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Letters to the Editors

Dear Editors,

I am grateful (and not for the first time) to Vernon Young for a sympathetic review of my poetry (*A Slow Dance*, "Poetry Chronicle," THE HUDSON REVIEW, Winter 1976–77). But he echoes an insinuation that I would like to track down when he says that I would seem "to have alienated critics with some evidently gauche Communist stuff he wrote a few years ago."

Is he, by any chance, referring to *The Rough Field,* a long poem with a mainly Ulster background which I published in 1972? As the title suggests, there are many shades of opinion represented in the poem, Catholic and Protestant, Republican and Loyalist, and many voices, even English from William Blake to Winston Churchill. But naive—I find the word gauche rather redundant in the context—Communism is not one of them or I am greatly mistaken, though there is *one* quote from Lenin.

Because of its length the book has yet to find a proper American publisher, but the Dolmen/Oxford edition is distributed by the Humanities Press, and I would ask those interested to check for themselves. But I think I am entitled to know from what tainted source has this intelligent critic received such McCarthyite misinformation. The expression of an historical and political vision in poetry is a very difficult task which the majority of writers, including many from my native Ulster, prefer to approach in an oblique manner. But we have a tragedy on our hands in this island and I do not see how a poet worthy of the name could avoid dealing with it. I am sure that Mr. Young would agree with me that sympathy, not sneers or smears, should greet such an effort.

JOHN MONTAGUE

Cork, Ireland

Dear Editors,

My apologies to Mr. Montague if I have misrepresented him by my summarized impression of someone else's review (or reviews). I cannot now quote chapter and verse of my sources, since I glance at some dozen or more literary journals a month, and what I read in the spring of 76 is beyond precise recall. That the report was "McCarthyite" I doubt; more likely I read it in *Encounter* or *The New Statesman* or *The Spectator,* but, as I said, I am now unable to trace the clue. One thing is certain: I did not dream it up. I had a *distinct* impression. Perhaps *gauche* is the offensive word (thought I had hopes the pun would be enjoyed!). In any case, I trust that my praise of Mr. Montague's last collection was sufficiently valuable to offset the parenthetical remark he found so crushing.

VERNON YOUNG

Stockholm, Sweden

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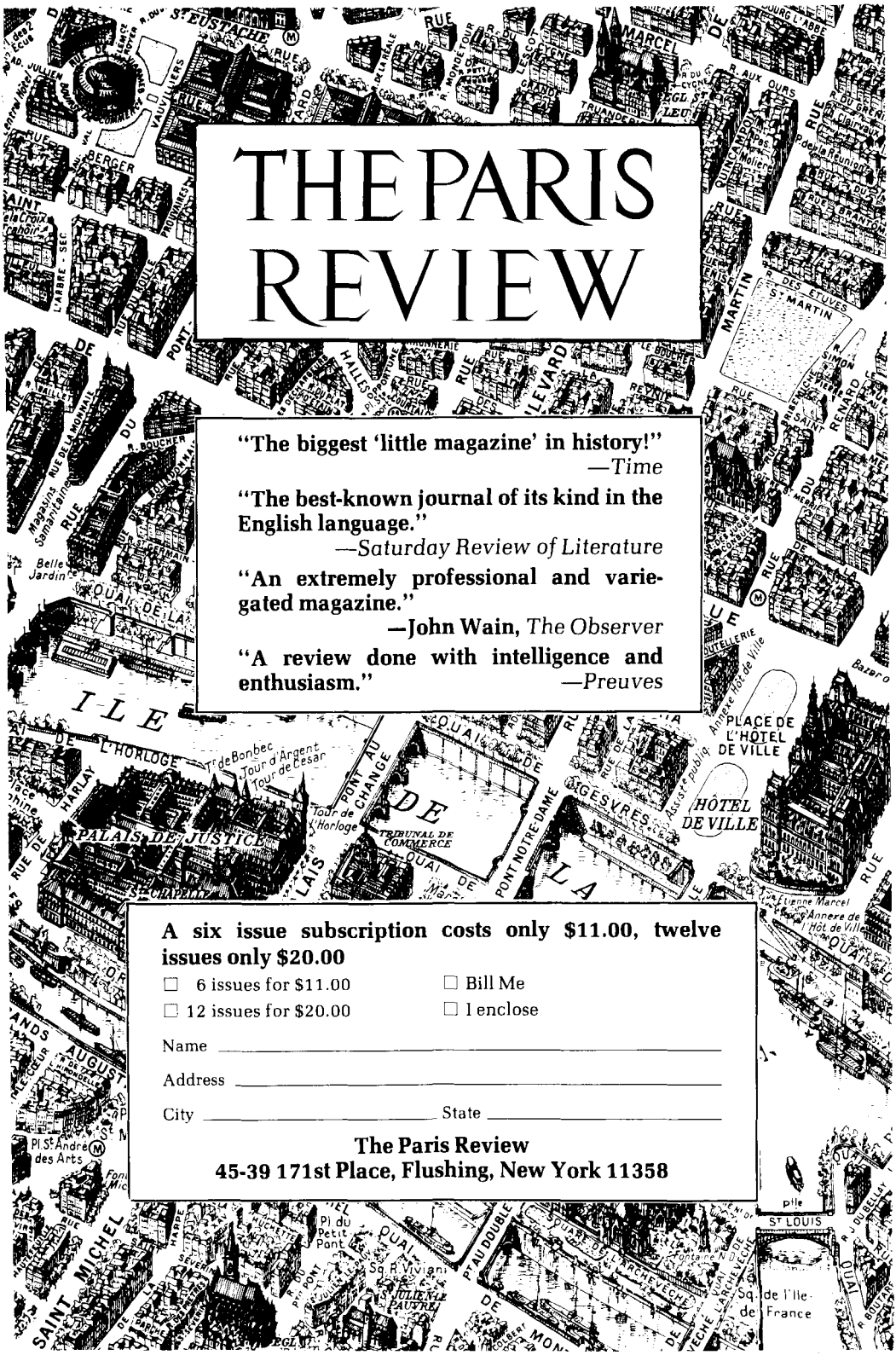
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FREDERICK BROWN

Reflections on Versailles

THE IMPULSE TO GIVE CULTURE a rational basis was nowhere more evident during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than in French theatre, where Aristotle's canon, after having served the heroic drama, came to tyrannize imitations thereof, like a frame growing even more ornate while the image it surrounds grows increasingly lifeless. Just as the Tridentine Church purged nudes and animals from religious iconography, so the bourgeoisie may be said to have cultivated a couth Muse, reserving their "legitimate" theatre—the Comédie-Française—for Beauty and banishing the Beast to fairground booths or private stages (the *théâtres de société*). Not until the post-Napoleonic era, in Romantic plays, would those two again form something comparable to the intimacy they had enjoyed before middle-class virtue won the day, domesticating stage kings much the way France's morganatic spouse, Madame de Maintenon, helped domesticate Louis XIV.

When, in 1701, Monsieur de Pontchartrain ordered the police commissioner, d'Argenson, to vet all works written for dramatic production, thus paving the way to a new institution, the censor's office, no one doubted that he had done so at Madame de Maintenon's request, or that it followed as consequence of aspersions cast upon her name. In 1697, the Italian comedy troupe had been expelled from France, learning, but learning too late, that liberties they could take in Louis' youth would not be countenanced in his middle age. "So long as they were content to wallow in ordure on the stage and sometimes in impieties, one did nothing more than laugh at them," wrote the Duke de Saint-Simon. "But they took it into their heads to stage a play entitled *The False Prude* wherein Madame de Maintenon was easily recognized . . . After three or four performances they received an order to close their theatre and leave the kingdom within a month." Such was the influence enjoyed by Madame de Maintenon—whose piety made people the more disposed to see in this former governess of the royal bastards a female Tartuffe—that Louis had long since lost his passion for theatrical entertainment and his sympathy for those who lived by

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it. Far from ignoring *les trois spectacles*—the Comédie-Française, the Théâtre Italien and Lully's Opera—he seemed actively to repent of them, as though they stood for all his past sins. In 1687, seven years after the Comédie-Française had received a royal charter that granted exclusive rights to perform dramatic dialogue in French, the king's minister, Louvois, expelled it from its quarters on rue Fossés-de-Nesle, declaring that its situation near a Catholic school did not allow virtue a sufficiently wide berth. Spurned by parish after parish (Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois argued that the theatre's violins would interfere with the Church's organ, and Saint-André-des-Arts that it already had too many 'cabarets'), the Comédie, even when it found another home in the city, on rue St. Germain-des-Prés, got no invitations to perform at Court. "The Court has grown so dull as to be unbearable, for the king imagines that by enforcing boredom, he thus gives proof of piety," wrote La Palatine, whose son, the future Regent, would more than avenge her for this dreary winter of Louis' reign. "It is a wretched thing when one wishes no longer to follow one's own reason and lets oneself be guided by self-serving priests and old courtesans." Fifteen years later, in 1702, she lodged the same grievance, Jesuits having become, if anything, more importunate, Madame de Maintenon older, and Louis a magnificent cousin of Molière's Orgon. The *comédiens du roi* feared that they would suffer the same fate as had recently befallen their Italian counterparts, and not without reason, for the clergy loudly demanded it. "The problem for our poor players is that the king no longer wishes to see plays," wrote the Princess Palatine to her aunt, the Duchess of Hanover. "So long as he attended the theatre, it was not a sin; it was, indeed, so far from being sinful that all the bishops would go there regularly; they had a bench reserved for them and it was always quite full. Ever since the king has withdrawn, so have they."

Even a brief consideration of the hero's decline in late seventeenth-century drama—of Racine's popularity won at Corneille's expense—may suffice to indicate how censorship made itself felt on stage before a censor did, entering the very fabric of characters along with romance, complicating dramatic action, setting up screens between the thought and the word. The Cornelian hero (that is, his early, most durable incarnations—Rodrigue, Horace, Polyeucte) conducts a debate between kinship and his duty to King or God, between human nature and the categorical imperative that

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would have him transcend it, between love and *gloire*. Torn though he may feel, his diction bespeaks his cohesion, the rigid paradoxes serving as a kind of girder that holds together what it holds apart. Each force is made fully articulate, each claim upon him published. Indeed, the heroic act would not inspire awe if it did not compel him to forswear *legitimate* affections, to oppose his virtuous moiety. Subduing thoughts of private advantage, it is an adequate response to catastrophe, stoic in spirit rather than puritanical. "I do not at all hate life, and love the ways of it/But without slavish attachment," declares Polyeucte. Like the biblical Jacob, who emerges from his bout with the angel a marked man named "Israel" or "Prince," Cornelian heroes become heroic by overriding their subjective voice, tearing free from familial custom, and assuming some other identity than the one given them at birth. A willful leap, and they attain themselves "outside," in the third person (literally with Rodrigue whose victory transforms him into Le Cid), their objective support being the empire they save or the heaven they defend. "I no longer know you, if you are not a Christian," says the titular hero of *Polyeucte* to his wife. "I still know you, and that is what kills me," exclaims Curiace to Horace, the brother-in-law with whom he must join battle, admiring, despite himself, his adversary's heroic implacability. If Cornelian drama pivots on alienation scenes, these have the same effect as recognition scenes, placing within the family circle a consanguineous stranger, an antagonistic self who does it violence. Now murderer (Horace kills his sister), now victim (Polyeucte is killed by his father), the hero creates an internecine wound through which some exalted order of values, or higher affiliation, may enter Nature's closed mind. Lest that mind close once again, none the wiser for experience, lest it preserve its virginity, king or God intercedes, decreeing that the family reconstitute itself around him, just as the hero himself mends and grows around the scar of his epiphany. *Le Cid* and *Horace* conclude with a trial reminiscent of *The Eumenides*; *Polyeucte* with a conversion of the martyr's survivors.

In Racinian drama, there is no exit this side of the grave, no ground outside palace or harem on which would-be heroes may find purchase, God having become ironical and affairs of state synonymous with the family's civil war. Unable to liberate themselves, they dream of liberation, like adolescents transported by literature but stuck in history, in resistant matter, in the home. Where the

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essence of Corneille's hero is his metal, an incorruptible substance which Horace praises in these terms:

> . . . C'est rarement qu'il s'offre une matière
> A montrer d'un grand coeur la vertu tout entière.
> Suivant l'occasion elle agit plus ou moins,
> Et paraît fort ou faible aux yeux de ses témoins.
> Le peuple, qui voit tout seulement par l'écorce,
> S'attache à son effet pour juger de sa force.[1]

the essence of Racine's protagonists is their vicariousness. Inhabited by a corpse whose life divides them from themselves, they maintain that division in longing to unite with someone inaccessible to them. Even the dream of heroic extrapolation takes them inward and backward (but where else do dreams lead?), consummating their bondage. "I have even wished I stood in my father's place," says Titus in *Bérénice*, imagining that if he were the arrogant Vespasian, he would conquer the world—in order to lay it, along with himself, at Bérénice's feet. If Hippolytus had been Theseus, says Phèdre in the play that bears her name, she—as Ariadne—would not have allowed his fate to hang upon a thread, but have rescued him in person from the Labyrinth:

> Compagne du péril qu'il vous fallait chercher
> Moi-même devant vous j'aurais voulu marcher
> Et Phèdre au Labyrinthe avec vous descendue
> Se serait avec vous retrouvée, ou perdue.[2]

Fancying herself transfigured into a hero who slays the monster and, unaided, emerges from underground, she thereby buries herself in her mother's womb; just as Pasiphaë, enslaved by her senses, had slept with a bull and bore the Minotaur, so now Phèdre, enslaved by Pasiphaë, cannot but wish to combine with her stepson, laying bare a monster even in assuming the guise of virtue.

[1] "Rarely does an issue arise/That displays the virtue of a great heart in all its scope./According to the occasion it acts more or less/And appears to its witnesses strong or weak./The common man, who sees only the bark of things/Judges its force by measuring its effect."

[2] "Companion in the peril you could not but seek/I, myself, would have wished to walk in front of you/And Phèdre, having descended with you into the Labyrinth/Would, with you, have lost herself or found herself again."

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Britannicus exemplifies this same labyrinthine irony, circling inward when it appears to move centrifugally. Through four acts, young Nero, who has just succeeded Diocletian, cuts a figure very different from the one portrayed by Tacitus, uttering tender thoughts and flashing signs of moral discrimination, only to betray himself in act five. Rather than assert his independence, Nero finally becomes Nero, the illusion of a Cornelian leap into the third person making his Racinian fall into a given self all the more poignant. As the play turns out to have been nothing but a play—a parenthetical dream closed by history—so its protagonist turns out to have been an actor whose face masked his forefathers':

> Il se déguise en vain; je lis sur son visage
> Des fiers Domitius l'humeur triste et sauvage.[3]

says Agrippina. In Corneille, *virtu* constitutes a hero's identity, the play furnishing circumstances that prove him equal to himself. In Racine it constitutes a semblance, the anti-hero being at heart a child (a Minotaur half-human half-beast) and the drama his make-believe. Similarly, one victory suffices to set the boundaries of a Cornelian kingdom and to define the person of a Cornelian victor. In Racine, nobody wins. The hopeless pursuit is an epitome of history striving for stasis, of mankind amorously begetting generation after generation as if finally to be one with itself, like Don Juan in the lists, and instead, widening an inner rift with each successive birth. Conquerors become jailers to their progeny, who mimic conquest. Those who fashioned history become history itself for actors whose fantasy of *gloire*, unfolding within the prisonhouse, have no external content. Does Phèdre, who cowers between her father Minos, judge of the Underworld, and her forefather Apollo, lord of the sky, imagine herself cosmically exposed? "The heavens, the whole universe is cram full of my ancestors. Where can I hide?" Her paranoid lament resembles a narcissistic boast. Divided in the core, protagonists can fix no limits to life. They propagate a universe of desire or commit suicide, rule omnipotently or surrender ignominously, wear masks or dissolve, shrink—most of all from themselves—or expand to the limits of Creation, elaborating these

[3] "He disguises himself in vain; I read upon his face/The sad and wild humor of the proud Domitii."

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drastic alternatives within a closed space, like actors pretending on a stage. Nothing comes of their play but loss. When it ends—the solution as well as the imbroglio having been engineered by some remote power (inside themselves)—they depart, none the wiser for it.

In Phèdre's question, "Where can I hide?"—a question reflected in her feat of naming names—the Court heard its own perplexity echoed. By the 1670's, Horace and Rodrigue seemed as fabulous to the Racinian inmates of Versailles as Roland. Although they had occasion, during a festival honoring Corneille in 1674, to observe that the playwright's last-born lacked the native resolution of his first-born, that generals could waver (if not, as on the English stage, weep), appearances deceive, and heroic ground melt away—even so, a program of *Cinna, Pompée, Horace, Sertorius, Oedipe* and *Rodogune* on six successive nights undoubtedly made the Sabbath more welcome than usual. Had he been present, Saint-Simon, who wrote many years later that:

> The frequent fêtes, the private promenades at Versailles, the journeys were means on which the king seized in order to distinguish or mortify the courtiers, and thus render them more assiduous in pleasing him. He felt that of real favours he had not enough to bestow; in order to keep up the spirit of devotion, he therefore unceasingly invented all sorts of ideal ones, little preferences and petty distinctions, which answered his purpose as well . . .

would have grieved at the spectacle of effeminate romance watching virile politics and delivered himself, once again, of his obsessive complaint that none but bastards and commoners won title to power under the king.

Louis' absolutism anticipated the reign of commoners—of commoners who would, in their drama, ritually purge the family of all baseness, commoners who would raze the wall of Paris but recreate the capital as a deontological fortress excluding the rabble, commoners who would predicate their ascendancy upon worship of the machine, and keep the dark self buried beneath the glassy *fini* of academic painting, the pieties of classical rhetoric or the bureaucratic maze of "well-made" plays. Just as the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie built huge theatrical temples in which to celebrate domestic anecdotes, employing Eiffel's ingenuity in the service of Sardou's banality, so Louis XIV staged, in Versailles, a well-made

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play that had its adulterous *péripéties* and its virtuous conclusion, the denouement lasting some thirty years. If Saint-Simon's cruel epitaph—"He reigned in little things; the great he could never reach"—waited nearly one century before provoking Bolingbroke's famous response in *Le Verre d'Eau,* "You shouldn't despise the little things; it's through them that one achieves the great . . . Great effects from small causes," it serves prosaic justice that The Sun King should have found a posthumous, albeit unwitting, attorney in Eugene Scribe, for Louis' power was never sufficiently absolute to dispel his fear of the world outside Versailles. He feared Paris as the Parisian bourgeois feared the faubourg, time having failed to dull his memories of 1648 when the mob burst into his bedchamber at the Palais Royal and surrounded him for one traumatic instant. "He early showed a disinclination for Paris," wrote Saint-Simon, "since the troubles that had taken place there during his minority made him consider the place dangerous," adding that "he wished to render himself venerable by hiding himself from the eyes of the multitude." Then too, it had been from the crowd of Les Halles that Ravaillac, his grandfather's assassin, had lunged, knife in hand, and delivered the fatal thrust. Nobles who preferred town-houses in Paris' Marais quarter to tiny apartments in the palace, and freedom of movement to the straitjacket of court life, became the object of his fear for not sharing it. Their names, mentioned in Louis' presence, often drew from him a disdainful blank. "I do not know them," the king would say, or else. "They are people I never see," implying that what he did not see ought not exist. And yet he would doubtless have felt quite vulnerable without daily reports submitted to him by his spies, *les mouches*, who were everywhere in Paris, working streets, churches, monasteries, hotels, private houses. Where his public face, like a classical statue's, saw nothing, nothing was beneath the notice of his private eyes who communicated the information they had gleaned in letters or in person, entering the royal cabinet by a hidden staircase.

Paris sought to propitiate him, to make amends for the humiliation he had suffered there as a child during the civil war. Thus, municipal officers commissioned Girardon to carve an equestrian statue of him and erected it, in August 1699, on Place Louis-le-Grand (Place Vendôme), the populace marvelling at its immense proportions. "The King is represented wearing raiment in the antique style, without saddle or stirrups, such as Heros of proud

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Antiquity were ordinarily portrayed," wrote Brice during the Regency. "To form some idea of the volume of this colossal figure, imagine that before it was finished, on several occasions twenty men tried to enter the horse's stomach and stand therein, which they did, comfortably aligned to either side of a table . . . ." But their gesture, if intended to bring him around, consecrated his absence instead. Louis left Paris to an effigy of himself that reflected both his myth and his stratagem: Godlike in demeanor, in volume, in self-absorption, it had room inside for a score of tattletales.

This bureaucracy extended throughout Versailles as well, where it was accountable to a chamberlain who kept Louis abreast of all the liaisons and machinations that made court life go around. It picked up phrases dropped in the galleries, in the gardens, on the stairs, even in bed. One could no more write confidentially to those outside than speak to confidants within, for letters were unsealed and read as a matter of course (if people found themselves ruined without knowing "from whence the petard on which they were hoist had been launched," others, like the Princess Palatine, whose rank gave her immunity, reviled Madame de Maintenon in correspondence, knowing full well that her letters, before reaching a destination abroad, glanced off their mark at home). Privacy belonged to no one but the king who might have borrowed from Descartes the motto *larvatus prodeo,* "I go forward masked." Like an actor only playing king, he was as jealous of attention paid to his image as fearful of eyes that pried beneath it and, if one may believe Saint-Simon who observed him very closely, walked around his domain expecting that a sharp glance would take him unawares. Behind the Hall of Mirrors lay a palace of crannies. "He looked to the right and to the left, not only upon rising but upon going to bed, at his meals, in passing through his apartments, or his gardens of Versailles, where alone the courtiers were allowed to follow him; he saw and noticed everybody; no one escaped him, not even those who hoped to remain unnoticed . . . He had an excellent memory; in this way, that if he saw a man who, twenty years before, perhaps, had in some manner offended him, he did not forget the man, though he might forget the offence." Of those dark places, none was darker than his own apartment. The most intimate relationship he had ever had, that with Madame de Maintenon, remained officially unconsummated. As propriety in eighteenth-century bourgeois drama dictated that love affairs be called "secret mar-

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riages," so, reversing the euphemism, Louis kept secret a marriage which Versailles—undeceived by Madame's separate quarters—called a liaison.

Similarly, idleness during the pious phase of Louis' reign came to resemble nothing so much as the enforced leisure of well-to-do bourgeois. While Louis—a diligent man—departed from aristocratic tradition by insisting that he exercised a *métier* (*le métier du roi* or "kingcraft" was a favorite expression of his), he upheld old laws forbidding noblemen to engage in trade, not unlike the successful *paterfamilias* of a later age whose wife would have brought shame upon him had she dared to exercise a profession. "There is a certain routine which does not change: always the same pleasures, always at the same time and always with the same people," wrote Madame de Lafayette, referring in particular to *appartement,* a diversion from the usual diversions, so called because it took place in Louis' own suite of rooms. "The *appartement,*" as described the Princess Palatine,

> is something quite unendurable. One goes to the billiard room and grovels, nobody exchanging a word; one remains thus crouched until the king has played his round. Then everyone rises and advances to the conservatory where one sings an act from some old opera sung over and over again. It is now time for the ball, which lasts from eight till ten; those like myself who do not dance stay there for two hours riveted to their seat, seeing and hearing nothing but an endless minuet. At a quarter to ten, one dances the contredanse, each in turn, like children reciting catechism, whereupon the ball concludes.

The larger contredanse—mandatory strolls, daily Mass, attendance at the king's Dinner or at his *lever* and *coucher*—celebrated the ideal of a world perfectly controlled in rhythm and design, where peers, like actors on the polite stage, would have violated etiquette by obeying an impulse to run. Their very titles became choreographic symbols which denoted not their hereditary fiefdoms out yonder but their place within a minutely ritualistic order, not their seat of power but their seat at table. Such tangible gifts as Louis bestowed upon his illegitimate offspring only served to emphasize the intangibility of *le sang* (noble blood), the theatricality of lineage, lords and ladies waging war over emblems rather than over things, and doing it with props rather than arms (thus, for example, the Battle of the Three Chairs: who, depending on rank, might, in

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conversation, occupy the armchair, who an armless chair and who a *tabouret* or three-legged stool was a problem that led to epic controversies). At a palatial remove from reality, the aristocratic class elaborated itself as pure form, investing its energy and talent in occult niceties that bring to mind Oriental court life or, in a more pedestrian context, obsessional neurosis.

As for its dance-master, who might not have conceived himself a *princeps solutus legibus,* a king absolved of customary law, had custom not already lost the force of law ("Am I still king?" he is reported to have asked on waking up one morning, after gambling away a fortune at lansquenet the night before), Louis made artifice of vassals in the same spirit that he imposed decorum on shrubs, striving to create a self-referential enclave, a vast theatre of androids governed absolutely by his will. For all her knowledge of the king, Madame de Maintenon, who wrote reproachfully that:

> He wants to accommodate religion to humble himself, not himself to religion; he wishes to observe all the externals, but not its spirit. He will never miss a station or a penance, but he will never understand that it is necessary to humble himself and enter into the true spirit of penitence . . .

did not understand, let alone grant, that the rules of courtly deportment or *bienséances* and the gestural vocabulary of religious observance might prove sufficient unto themselves, that, for Louis, grace could lie in autonomic punctilio and heaven in what Saint-Simon called "the revolving mechanism of daily existence." Years before, in 1673, when his palace was still a vision half-formulated, he had written to his architect from the battlefield: "You must arrange for the pumps of Versailles to function so well, especially those of the reservoir up above, that when I arrive they do not cause me dismay by breaking down continually," adding, one month later, that he would see his fountains play twelve hours a day and regulate them himself. If, in 1677, he formed the resolve that they must play not twelve hours a day but round the clock ("I would very much like to find the pumps so primed that fountains in view of the chateau keep going always," he wrote, once again while at the battle front), from this apparently trivial revision one deduces that the royal city whose heart was its fountain had become what it was always meant to be—a paradigm of the mechanistic universe—and Louis himself, regulating its machinery, a surrogate of the watchmaker God.

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Indeed, his religious views, set forth in a memoir he wrote to instruct his son in the *mêtier du roi*, would not have seemed altogether uncongenial to those eighteenth-century philosophers and divines who found evidence of God's existence in God's material creation, and of transcendent purpose in the rational design of nature; one passage, dealing with "machines, buildings, and a thousand other things," is the platform on which he lectures the *dauphin* as to the duties and responsibilities of the *Rex Christianissimus*, The Most Christian King. What Madame de Maintenon put down as the "externals" of religion were, for him, the articulations of its body:

> As he [the king] is of a rank superior to all other men, he sees things more perfectly than they do, and he ought to trust rather to the inner light than to information which reaches him from outside . . . Occupying, so to speak, the place of God, we seem to be sharers of His knowledge as well as of His authority.

Seated on a throne that could not but fix in his mind the idea of dethronement, at odds with usurpative subjects and a world in flux, Louis had recourse, on the one hand, to espionage and, on the other, to axiomatic categories, to hermetic edifices, to blind forms. Now gathering secret intelligence of the outside, now censoring the outside altogether, he appears to have believed, as would the bourgeoisie after its fashion, that human affairs, if not absolutely controlled, must become chaotic, that society, if it did not conform to a taxonomic order or mechanistic laws, must revert to wild nature, and that life was either unfailingly grammatical or wrapped in mystery. His belief that the king, being of a rank superior to all other men, sees things more perfectly than they (and the king of kings, the *Rex Christianissimus,* more perfectly than all other kings), affirmed itself in theatre, in ruinously expensive displays like the mock siege of Compiègne which Saint-Simon, a witness to it, describes as follows:

> To witness it, the King, Madame de Maintenon, all the ladies of the Court, and a number of gentlemen, stationed themselves upon an old rampart, from which the plain and all the disposition of the troops could be seen . . . It was the most beautiful sight that can be imagined, to see all that army, and the prodigious number of spectators on horse and foot, and that game of attack and defence so cleverly conducted.

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In his prime, he led military campaigns, sending instructions to the architect of Versailles. In old age, having joined battle with all Europe, he directed the general progress of war from Versailles, trusting rather more to the inner light than to information from outside. "The results of this campaign will decide; it is completely in the hands of God," he told the Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris. "I have reason to believe that it will be his pleasure to evince once again His divine knowledge of my pure intentions and of the sacrifices I have resolved to make that my people may enjoy peace." As French armies suffered one defeat after another, the country going to wrack and ruin, Louis became ever more pedantic in his enforcement of manners at court. And the fountains played round the clock.

From gardenside of the palace, two statuary fountains, aligned by a grassy strip called *Le Tapis Vert* or "Green Carpet" guide the eye to infinity. One, a ways off in the distance, has steeds drawing Apollo's chariot full-tilt and, to either side, outriders trumpeting his zenith. The other, close up, occupies garden center, its position and motifs deriving (as do those of a cloister fountain) from its symbolic parent, the *fons juventutis,* the Source or the Tree of Life: here, creatures half-frog half-human worshipfully lift webbed arms toward Latona, Apollo's mother, holding the infant God.[4] When the *Roi Soleil* himself beheld what he had wrought, his eye would thus encompass a totality, visiting one mode of his divine persona here, and another there, en route to the horizon. This visual journey, like the sun's, led round about in an eternal return. It could bring him nothing from without, no external perception if you will, since the landscape, having been laid down textually, was, insofar as possible, devoid of accident. Engineers, topiary artists, sculptors saw to it that the machinery never failed, that the vegetation observed a geometrical etiquette, that the statues remained unweathered, employing their diverse skills against the arch-enemy, time. In this garden, where nothing might grow according to nature, everything spoke of the Apollonian ideal. Sameness and stillness celebrated a God whose progress along the axial road or "Green Carpet" was not linear but circular, infancy and manhood representing simultaneous events, chapters already written at birth, elaborations of a transcendent premiss. Had we no other

[4] Frogs are among the most ancient and enduring symbols of fertility.

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intelligence of Louis, this purview alone would reveal a mind more disposed to feed upon gospel than upon history, a theatrical temperament that brooked no contradiction either from life beyond the royal stage or from life within the royal actor, as though even one flaw, one lapse, were flaw and lapse enough to readmit his impotent minority. "He has the gravity of a *roi de théâtre*," wrote Primi Visconti, one of his political informers. However great the pleasure he took in having "eyes open all over the earth to learn the news of provinces and nations, the secrets of all the courts, the humors and failings of princes and their ministers, to be informed of the infinite number of things that one thinks we do not know, to see around us that which people strive to hide . . . to discover the true views of courtiers, their hidden interests . . . I know of no pleasure that I would not give up before surrendering this one"—he took still greater pleasure contemplating, from his palace, a sphere that orbited around him blindly, a microcosm that resolved into legible surfaces, geometrical forms, statues, his desire for knowledge of all that didn't meet the eye. This actor could finally *be* the role he played so cogently by abolishing human subjects, himself most particularly, and at his death left France for dead.

The two fountains that narrate Apollo's sacred career may be seen as representations of a world-view as absolute in its masculine arrogance as in its femininity. Loving waterworks, there is no doubt that Louis derived his pleasure, in large part, from the domination of a supremely amorphous element, from the constraint he placed upon it to leave its own course and follow his, to flow or dribble or leap or fall as he saw fit. The semi-arid land around Versailles made it a paradoxically advantageous site, allowing him one more grand opportunity to exercise his will against nature. In order to syphon water from the Seine, a plant consisting of fourteen hydraulic wheels and two hundred twenty-three pumps was constructed at Marly (known, ever since, as Marly-la-Machine). When after five years, this, together with an aqueduct, stood complete, Louis straightaway undertook to provide the fountains an inexhaustible supply of water by diverting the river Eure from its bed. "The King wishes to make the Eure come his way," noted Dangeau, suggesting a parallel between Eure and nobility, between the river's natural bed and ancestral estates. To this enterprise, the Academy of Sciences, Louvois, Vauban, the corps of engineers and an entire army devoted three years, now digging an artificial watercourse,

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now sinking piles that were to support the sixteen hundred arcades (some of them twice Notre Dame's height) of an aqueduct called *l'aqueduc de Maintenon*. It claimed almost as many lives, proportionately, as did, in our own century, the Soviet Union's White Sea Canal, and, like the White Sea Canal, came to nought, another war interrupting this one in 1688. Undaunted by the Ozymandian wreck in whose pillars he didn't foresee his own "trunkless legs of stone," Louis lent support to a third project, one that would allow waters of the plateau between Versailles and Rambouillet to be collected and led by channels to his palace.

Behind the waterworks, then, lay the siegeworks of a war—a technological war—that anticipated Louis' other military endeavors. If these lost tactical rigor in losing a specific object (rather like some photographic image getting blurry with enlargement), if his foe, seen from afar, became semi-faceless, and his strategist God, perhaps the energy to control, to master, to shape was generated by a nightmare of dissolution which age and infirmity made increasingly pleasurable. It is as though Apollo, whose horses draw him in the direction of Latona, had, with night approaching, relaxed the stone reins and surrendered to an element he coerced at noonday. One is reminded of a festival held at Versailles in 1674—not the one honoring old Corneille, but another to celebrate the end of summer. It took place after dark, on the canals, that cross like nave and transept beyond the two fountains, Louis embarking in one gondola with his chosen few, Lully following him with *les violons du roi*. Silhouetted against the night sky, where the altarpiece would hang, were horses of fire rearing up beneath hero-riders. At either end of the transept, toward Trianon and the Menagerie, Neptune's chariot surrounded by tritons and Apollo's chariot escorted by The Hours formed artificial constellations. Along each bank, incandescent ropes outlined the cross itself; afloat within it, Louis could behold his palace, lit so as to appear not man-made but astral, not a thing of stone but a heavenly abode. "In the profound silence of night," wrote Felibien, "one heard the violins that trailed after His Majesty's vessel. The sound of these instruments seemed to animate all the shapes, whose subdued light gave the symphony, in return, a charm it would not have had in total darkness. While the vessels floated along slowly, one glimpsed the water whitening round about; and the oars, which touched it softly and in measured strokes, left furrows of silver."

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The monarch who could afford such nocturnal pageants—and Louis never tired of gondola rides by night—could scarcely resist the temptation to believe that his "inner light" shone from outside, to lull himself aloft, to dissolve resistant personality, to make the world dark and projected emblematic blow-ups of himself onto a celestial stage. As historians have noted, The War of the Spanish Succession, which laid waste to France and Europe during Louis' last years, answered the need to prove technological innovations. But is was, concomitantly, that late summer night's dream, no longer confined by season, custom, or light of day, and produced, with a far more numerous cast, as the *Götterdämmerung*. Did Louis mistake himself for the Louis XIV he had shaped onstage, like some *arriviste* longing to be absorbed in an image or in an archetype, to be consecrated at the end of time or in the beginning? "Men," said he in one of those proclamations of divine right that made war unavoidable, "must accept God's impenetrable judgments" rather than "place confidence in their own strength." Abdicating, he did so to Louis the God-State; surrendering, he surrendered to Himself omniscient and unknowable.

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*From "The Plot Against the Giant," *Harmonium*.

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PETER MAKUCK

Sleds on the Rue de l'Eglise

Boys fall
one after another
into the speed
of the hill.
Here it's a *luge*—
no steering bar, all wood,
even the runners.

Every time down
it gets darker
and I hear our mothers
yelling from porches.
But these just appear
in doorways
or empty the street
with a wooden clap
of the shutters.

I lie down stiffly
in the cold, settle
with the snow outside.
My Flexible Flyer
whispers like sleep
on the hill: Benny
ropes a bumper
for the ride back up:
a white space
grows between us.
House lights come on.
Some mothers yell
others just lean
for the shutters.
Yet the snow
is the same—

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not young or old.
It provides the voice
that wakes us
draws us shivering
to silver windows
to meet the dream
of friends sliding
under the streetlight.

But it's our mothers
who call us
from a great distance
from varnished doors
deep under snow.

Above Challes-les-Eaux

On good Sundays
Gliders in slow motion
Tack the cliffs
Searching for thermals

Then widen the blue
Between themselves
And the stone chapel
Of Mt. Saint Michel.

Stubby as a bee
The tow plane groans
To get them aloft.
With a few Savoyards
We climb toward
The taunting whistle.

The sudden white cross
Becomes a glider

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Barely moving upwind
Then skimming the chapel
Of the archangel—keeper
Of a bolted dark.

Sometimes from behind
They surprise us
Drift just overhead
And draw open
The deep green space
Beyond our shoetips.

We stand and watch
The great wings tilt
The pilots sealed
In a system of silence
Work and work
For that final lift.

Now they soar and bank
Quiet and bright
And simple
Like parts of ourselves
We have no time to fly.

But here: the steep path,
Rocks, pink thistles,
Huge whistling wings
And some fragile presence
Above Challes-les-Eaux.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

Two Romantic Pieces

Une Allée du Luxembourg by Gérard de Nerval

There now, she's passed, that slight
One, just there and gone like a bird,
Holding a bright flower, humming
Some tone I almost heard.

Might she have loved me? Maybe
Hers is the last little light
In the whole world that could enter
My deep, deepening night.

But no. That time is over.
Good-bye, small light that shone,
Fragrance, woman, music,
Happiness . . . you are gone!

Tristesse by Alphonse de Lamartine

Once more let me go, I said, where that blest shore
Images Naples over an azure sea,
Palaces, hills, unmisted stars, the orange trees
Blossoming there under skies eternally pure!
What delays you? Come! I would see again
Vesuvius flaming, mounting from the very waves;
On her heights I would worship the inchoate dawn;
I would descend, as in a smiling trance, those slopes,
Leading the way for somebody I adore.
Follow me where the coast of that tranquil bay
Winds in and out: let us tread once more that path
Our footsteps knew so well, to the ruined Gardens

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Of Cynthia, Virgil's Tomb, the Temple of Venus:
There, under orange trees, under the flowering vine
That twines so slenderly amidst the myrtle
And weaves a mantle of blossom above your head,
In the music of gentle waves or the murmuring wind,
There together, alone with our love, alone in nature,
Like the light our life will seem sweeter.

Now
My days resemble the torchlight, acrid, guttering,
Little by little snuffed in the winds of anguish,
Or shedding sometimes, when in my heart the memories
Of you rekindle, a lurid and momentary glimmer.
I do not know if finally the gods will permit me
To complete my difficult journey here on earth;
My horizon contracts, and my bewildered eyes
Hardly dare search beyond one narrow season.
    But if I must die tomorrow,
If in this land once destined for happiness
    I must let fall from my hand
    The goblet that fate had seemed
To wreathe with rose petals fragrantly all
For my pleasure, I beg them only to lead me
Again to the shore that your memory still adorns.
There in a sad remoteness I may hail once more
Those sunny vistas, and die where I tasted life!

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RUTH FAINLIGHT

The Route Napoleon

Pollarded trees produce new growth—
This year's twigs and leaves displayed
As evidence. Trees marked by cryptic
Streaks of paint, posters, reflector-disks
Pressed into their trunks, wounds roughly dressed
With tar. Trees planted to absorb
The fumes of traffic, clothe embankments
And disguise the motor-way.
Trees used; trees with the hopeless, doomed
Servility of mutilated slaves
Or trophy prisoners from some
Forgotten war. Trees that can
No longer represent another realm
Or further possibility,
But stand there, rooted, by the side
Of the road, trapped as much as any
Speeding driver or his passenger.

Evening and Dawn

Clouds like enormous beckoning hands, like seraphim—
fiery wheels of heads and wings revolving before the throne
of God and heralding its approach.

A tinge of bronze on clouds the shape of a crane flying, legs
streaming behind; full moon poised over its head like a crown
and Venus the jewel on its anklet.

Sky clear and pure as a fresco at evening and dawn.

Dewy nap of lawn and dense firmness of silhouetted trees;

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borders sharp-drawn between absorbent blackness and blanched reflecting surfaces.

The sea rolling in, countless small glintings and flashings as the source of radiance elevates and alters the shadows continually.

An intensifying stillness, no wind, diminution of sound.

Every moment new awakenings.

Yet the longer I gaze at the garden, the more its substances waver and fade into misty darkness.

In the augmenting heat, the stones on the beach
take on weight and solidity; each separate atom now
dancing the glory of light.

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ROBERT PHILLIPS

Children of Old Booger

For Stephen Philbrick

THE FIRST TIME I SAW THE THREE BERGER BROTHERS, I immediately thought of sheep.

Now, everything one says about sheep is absolutely true—sheepish expressions, following like sheep, and the rest. It was not long after we moved onto my wife's grandparents' farm that I learned that. If one sheep went around a rock, the others went around the rock. If one leapt over it, the others would leap.

And the Berger boys were just like sheep, holding onto one another's shirt-tails as they clambered aboard the rackety No. 5 school bus which I drove for extra income. Shy, white-faced and white-haired, dirty hooves and clothes, they reminded me of nothing more than three sheep. Their timid, put-upon expressions were especially sheepish.

Lester, Jester, and Billy were their names. Lester and Jester were not twins, and just why the euphony ended with Jester, I could not say. Billy was the youngest. All three suffered from their names: Not the Lester and Jester business, that seemed ordinary enough among school children whose first names were Monroe and Roscoe, Roy and Floy, Mike-Ed and Bobby Lee. No, they were teased because of their last names. All the bus children called the Bergers the *Boogers*. "Yonder come the Boogers!" one would shout as soon as the three boys were sighted standing by the roadside. "Hey, Boogers!" the children shouted as the little sheeplike procession filed onto the bus, each clutching the shirt-tail before him.

This Booger business had been going on as long as anyone in Public Landing could remember. The boys' father was called Old Booger by just about everybody. Perhaps it was the way *his* father had mispronounced the name "Berger." Perhaps not. In all probability, the name Booger was the community's response to the way the Berger family had lived for decades. The Bergers were renters, but rarely paid rent. It was a known fact that the several landlords who had the Bergers evicted in the past had, afterward, suffered

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mysterious fires on their premises. The current Berger landlord was relatively new to Public Landing; he had not heard about Old Berger until too late, until he had rented to them and the Bergers had moved in. Then he was afraid to evict them, for fear his property would burn.

So the Bergers settled in and, unhasseled, rarely paid the rent. Old Man Berger is supposedly in the used-car parts business, another complaint from former landlords: Whenever the Bergers moved, a motley assemblage of junk cars and parts moved with them. The front and side yards would be littered with mechanical corpses. But nothing much could be done about that, either. Old Man Berger had been evicted frequently enough in his younger days to know all the ordinances. If a town or county clerk came to serve a summons for junk in the yard, Old Man Berger would cite such-and-such an amendment to the zoning laws which stated that anything on wheels was not classifiable as junk. He would then point to his "merchandise" in the yard. Sure enough, everything was on wheels. Even the disembodied engines rested on make-shift platforms with casters beneath.

"But it's all too close to the road," other town clerks said. "That so?" was the old man's reply. "Well, I just happen to know the town code calls for freedom from obstruction up to thirty-six feet from the crown of the road. Would you happen to have a tape measure on you, Sonny? I'll be more than happy to measure—" One of them actually did produce a steel tape measure, and Old Man Berger soberly paced off the distance. Nothing in the yard obstructed beyond the legal distance.

Old Man Berger was a rascal, all right, and proud of it. He worked harder at not working than most men work at a job. More than one morning when I drove past their house, I saw him in the yard, one hand steadying a log, the other hand on his hip, while his frail wife wielded an axe against a wedge, splitting logs for firewood.

So the three boys suffered being Bergers—or Boogers—just as they suffered poverty. Now there were a lot of poor farm families on my route, but Lester, Jester and Billy were about the poorest poor whites I knew. (In those days the blacks went to a separate school, halfway across the county.) "Do you know what they eat for lunch?" I asked my wife one night over dinner. We weren't eating so well ourselves that year; we had invested our savings in a trailer

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which we'd camped on a corner of her grandfather's farm. He promised us free use of the land and a share of the crops if I helped farm it. I was a city boy, in love then with the notion of earning our keep by the toil of my hands. I drove the school bus and helped work the farm while she conducted a social work project among local blacks. It was part of her Master's thesis. Ever since she had gone to school down there, she had been determined to do something to help the blacks (or Negroes, as they were called then). "How would I know what the Berger boys eat?" she replied.

"Sweet potatoes," I said.

"They're very nourishing," she said.

"Sure, but every day? Every day they get on the bus with this greasy paper bag, and I know exactly what's in it. Three small cold sweet potatoes, to be divided among them. A couple of days I didn't even see the bag, so they probably had nothing at all."

"They'll survive. You should see some of the families I visit. They'd be happy with sweet potatoes."

Yeh, but even so—couldn't we pack a little something extra for them every day? We always have something left over in the refrigerator. Most of the other kids eat pretty well. The school has this incredible twenty-five cent lunch, I don't know how they do it. The government must sent food, or subsidize it. But Old Man Berger, he doesn't have seventy-five cents a day for those three boys. So it's sweet potatoes."

"It's worth a try," she said. "I'm sure we can help."

"Don't bother," my grandfather-in-law said over Sunday dinner. We always crossed the field and had a big family spread in the farm house on Sundays. There was nothing much else to do in Public Landing on Sundays, and Cindy's grandmother was a terrific cook. Besides, I liked her grandfather. Months of working side by side in the fields, often silently, had created a great respect for his stamina and wisdom.

"Don't bother trying to help old Booger," he said. "People have tried, Lord knows. Why, two or three Thanksgivings ago, the Baptist church got up a big basket of food, and delivered it to their door. There was a roast turkey, dressing, pumpkin pie, I don't know what-all in that basket. And when the ladies of the church knocked on the door, Booger turned them away. 'We don't accept charity,' he said, and slammed the door in their faces."

"Well, that was different. That was putting their noses in it. Old

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Man Berger or his wife don't even have to *know* we're giving the boys a little something extra."

"He'll know," Cindy's grandfather said.

"Those Boogers are irredeemable," Cindy's grandmother said.

"You can't blame the boys for the sins of the father," I said, feeling righteously indignant.

"We want to try," Cindy said, and it was good feeling her on my side. We'd both decided that, while her work might eventually help all the blacks in the area, the Bergers would be my personal and immediate project.

It was Lester who handed me back the clean paper bag as the others were rushing out of the bus the following Monday morning. "What's this?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing, really," I said, trying to sound casual. "My wife—Cindy— and I thought you might like to sample some of her homemade cake. It's chocolate," Then I quickly added, "There's enough for all three of you. Ham sandwiches, too."

"Thanks," Lester said, pressing the bag into my hands. His white face had turned scarlet. "But we don't accept charity." This last was said deliberately and forcefully. He had, no doubt, heard it often enough from his father. Perhaps he had even been instructed to say it, if and when the occasion ever arose.

"Come on, Lester. Think of your brothers," I pleaded.

He hopped off the bus, as the others did directly behind him. "We get along okay. We get along just fine." He ran across the playground with his shirt-tails flapping behind him.

I never tried to press food upon the Berger boys after that. The old man had taught them too well. But with the onset of winter, I shifted my concern from the boys' stomachs to their backs. Day after day they appeared in the same mended cotton flannel shirts. The shirt-tails had been covered, but barely, with thin khaki windbreakers of the cheapest kind. Everyone else on the bus wore a mackinaw or storm coat of some sort. But not the Berger boys. Hatless, gloveless, they huddled at the bus stop in bedraggled cotton. The day of the first snow, it especially got to me. They climbed onto the bus looking like three blue babies.

"I can't stand it," I told Cindy that night, lying in our trailer bed. It was a narrow bed, expecially conducive to talking and love-making. We did a lot of both that year. As I've said, there wasn't much to do in Public Landing.

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"You'll have to get used to it," she said.

"I hope I never do," I said. "If I had any clothes would fit them, I'd give them to them."

"Well, you don't. Besides, the old man wouldn't let them keep them."

"I don't know. It's easy enough to be proud in warm weather—" My speech broke off, but a plan began.

Ever since we had moved to Public Landing, on what my mother termed "a fool's errand," she had been itching to do something for us. She came from a world where it was unthinkable to live in a trailer, let alone to work a farm. She had no real notion of what we were doing down there, but it did come through that Cindy was working with the poor. Her latest letter had begged us to "let her help" in some way.

Their sizes are, I wrote her, *average for an eight, a ten, and an eleven-year-old boy. They need good warm school clothes, especially warm coats. Please see what you can do.*

Within the week her reply came. *I'm taking up a collection at the church. Will buy and send as much as possible.*

Three weeks went by. Day after day the Berger boys got on and off the bus. If they were conscious of the cold, they didn't show it. But then, they rarely betrayed any emotions. Painfully introverted, I thought. Or perhaps, painfully ashamed. "Here come them Boogers!" the other children shouted. Here they came. Once they clambered onto the bus in my dreams: instead of counting sheep, I was counting Bergers.

Then one noon, when I came in from the barn for lunch, I checked the mailbox by the side of the road and found notice of a package at the post office. It was too large to fit in our box, the printed notice said. I knew it was the school clothes. I told Cindy's grandfather I had to ride into town and would join him later. I was so excited I forgot about eating lunch.

It was a big box, and when I returned to the trailer and opened it, I saw that the church women had been generous. My mother had bought each boy several things, all from the very best stores. It struck me almost as comical: there were, for starters, three wool loden coats from Abercrombie & Fitch. They were identical olive green, with wooden pegs for buttons. There were wool turtleneck sweaters from Bloomingdale's. And good warm slacks from Saks Fifth Avenue Boys' Shop. Imagine old man Booger's boys in Saks's finery! It was at once funny and wonderful. At the bottom of the

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box were undershirts, underpants, and socks. They didn't excite me then any more than finding underwear beneath the tree excited me as a boy on Christmas morning. But they were good and they were necessary. When Cindy came home we opened a bottle of cheap wine and celebrated the coming of the clothes.

I knew enough to know I must be careful how the clothes were presented. "I can't let anyone see me when I leave them," I told Cindy. She agreed. "If I give them any opportunity to return them, they will. But if they don't know *where* they came from, how can they return them?"

"The old man can refuse to let them have them, though," she said.

"Of course he can. But, you're forgetting the old woman. Would she let her boys go cold if she had a chance to dress them warmly?"

"I don't know."

"I don't know, either. I can only hope. I think pride is the crucial thing. If no one sees them accept the clothes, they won't have to return them in front of anyone. If no one sees the clothes delivered, the old man might almost think he can get away with people thinking he paid for them himself."

"Except, he'll know that *someone* around knows he didn't."

"Oh, I just don't know," I said. I was drunk on happiness, not wine. The thought of those boys looking not only as good as the rest of the kids, but better, made me very drunk. Better yet, they would be warm for probably the first winter of their lives.

"I'm going to take them over right now!" I declared.

"I thought you were going to wait until the weekend?"

"Can't wait. That's three more days of those boys being cold, if I wait. Besides, tonight's a good night. There's not much moon."

I repacked the box of clothing, tied a string around it all, only to realize the label addressed from my mother to me was still on the box. I untied it again, ripped off the label with my fingernails, inked out the postmark so no one would even know what city the box was mailed from, and retied it all. I doubted Berger could trace that box to me. No one ever asked where my family was from, they simply knew I was a "Yankee." And Old Man Berger wouldn't know Saks Fifth Avenue from Esherman's Hog Meal.

It was a dark night. I parked the car about a quarter mile from the Berger place, just to make sure the engine didn't create a disturbance. Then I walked uphill the rest of the way. It wasn't

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bad, walking on the shoulder of the highway. No cars passed. But when I reached their place and began to cross the yard, my difficulties began. I was soon picking my way through car parts and abandoned junk. Twice I fell, cursing. My only prayer was that they didn't keep a dog. If a dog sounded the alarm and a light went on and Old Man Berger caught me crossing his yard, he not only wouldn't accept the clothes, he'd probably shoot me for trespassing.

There was no dog. I stealthily made my way to the back door, the door I imagined they mostly used, and opened the screen. Though it was early December, the separate screen door was still on, as it would be, I imagined, all year round. The doorspring made a rusty sound, but not too much of one, and I closed the door again with the big cardboard box jammed between the screen and the backdoor. Inside the house was quiet as death—no radio, no television, no children's voices. I held my breath and made my way around front again, and soon was running down the highway toward my car.

I lay awake most of that night, wondering what would occur the next morning when the family discovered the box. Who would be the first to find it? What, exactly, would Old Man Berger say and do? I imagined him jamming the clothes back into the carton and throwing it on a junk pile out back. I imagined the mother crying, the boys closed-mouth as always, but hurting inside. In the morning, I was hung-over from lack of sleep.

I lurched behind the wheel of the school bus in a great state of excitement, and jammed the gear into reverse. So intent was I upon seeing the Berger boys, and what they were or were not wearing, I was barely conscious of making the many routine stops for the other school children. I had been on the road twenty minutes when it began to snow. Huge puffy wisps of it floated across the windshield. Soon it began to fall thick as cotton candy. As the bus lumbered up the small hill approaching the Berger place, I found myself leaning far forward into the windshield, as if to see better through the snow. Actually I was craning so to catch my first glimpse of the boys. Suddenly three olive green dots appeared on the horizon! I wanted to cry.

I braked the bus, let the door fly open, the three climbed in much as before, the last two holding onto the green coat-tails of the boy ahead. It may have been my imagination, but it seemed their

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expressions were less sheepish. Certainly they looked warmer. Little Billy seemed to have a new bounce to his walk as he went down the aisle, and Jester just grinned a bit. Then one of the kids in the back of the bus yelled out, "Hey, them Boogers got new coats!" I held my breath. Then it was Lester who volleyed back, immediately, "Yah, and what's it to you?" That was the end of that.

The morning marked what appeared to me to be a transformation in the Berger boys. As they climbed onto the bus each day, they soon were not tail-holding. Some days they actually were joking with the others. Lester especially became more outgoing. He always had a response whenever anyone kidded them about the Booger business, and I noticed some of the boys laughed with him now, not at him. Even the greasy paper bag disappeared. It was replaced by a tin lunch pail, identical to the ones the other children carried. I don't know who paid for it, and I suspect, if one lifted the lid, one would find the same fare of three hard and cold sweet potatoes. After all, winter clothes can't bring about an economic miracle. But the boys held their heads higher, there was no question of that. And Billy's walk got decidedly bouncier!

"They're changed boys," I told Cindy with delight.

"You must write your mother and tell her," she said.

And I intended to, except that I would rather take a beating than write any letter to anyone, so I put it off. When I finally got around to writing, it was quite a different letter than the one I would have written, had I written immediately.

Because one morning in February, and a cold morning it was, when I stopped the bus on the Berger hill, three shorn little lambs clambered on and hurried to sit down wherever there was a seat, without all the usual give and take from Lester with the boys in the back of the bus, without Billy's bobbing down the aisle, without Jester's little crooked smile. When I say shorn sheep, I mean literally as well as figuratively. Lester's, Jester's and Billy's heads had been shaved down to their scalps. As they rushed past me, they averted my astonished stare, gazing at the floor in embarrassment. And on their backs, instead of the Abercrombie loden coats and Bloomingdale sweaters, were the familiar cotton flannel rags of before.

I won't repeat what the boys in the back of the bus called up to them that, and every other morning for weeks. It is too cruel. As for the Berger boys, they said nothing. They sat huddled in their

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misery, staring at their feet or out the bus windows at the sterile husked landscape which separated home from school.

When I got back to the trailer, Cindy met me at the door. She was home early, and she already had heard. "Lice," she said.

I was a city boy, as I've said, and I didn't quite catch the full significance of that until she explained. "The school nurse found lice in their hair," she said. "She said their heads had to be shaved and . . . and their school clothes burned. She saw to it herself."

"I'm sure she did," was all I could say. Had the boys, in wearing those clothes, overstepped some invisible line? Had they become too un-booger like? Probably not. Probably, in their familial squalor, they had in their hair what the nurse said they had. It didn't matter. What mattered was the expression of those three faces the morning they had to confront the bus with shaven heads and their old Berger rags.

When I finally wrote my mother, it was to tell her how much good her collections and the clothes had done, but how we now needed more of the same. They didn't have to come from fancy department stores, either, I explained. They could be bargain basement, it didn't really matter. They could even be secondhand, so long as they were warm and presentable.

The second box was even longer in coming than the first. We had moved into April, and the days were feeling like spring. And this box was much smaller. *I had trouble getting the women interested, the second time around.* The clothes were serviceable, nevertheless, and I made a second midnight trek up Berger's hill and through the junk, leaving the second box between the screen and the back door.

If the boys ever saw those clothes, I never knew. They never wore them. I drove that number 5 school bus for two years, until Cindy finished her research. Every morning the Berger boys wore the same old things. When I left Public Landing they were each holding onto the shirt-tails of the other just as they were when I arrived.

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PAUL PETRIE

Adventure

The streetcar jerks and sways on its metal rails.
The hand-straps bang the roof.

Against the grimy window he leans one cheek
and peers into the night.
His stop is soon.
Shapeless the dark floods by,
pierced by the yellow eyes of hidden
houses,
and streetlights on the corners, iron-masked
and stiff as priests.

Around the bend they sway. His stop is next.
He stands on the wicker seat and pulls the cord—
but no sound comes. And again
he tugs at the yellow cord, but still
no sound—
"Conductor," he wants to cry—"Conductor, stop!"
but his tongue sticks in his mouth, no words escape—
and on through the swaying dark the streetcar rushes
on its iron rails.
Tears start to his eyes. He yanks at the cord
with all his strength—hangs on like a drowning man.
A distant wheezy buzz—
The wheels screetch on the rails—grind stop—The doors fold
back—and out he stumbles
into the moth-winged night.

One mile back,
among those dark-clumped houses
is his house. With beating heart,
he begins the long journey through alien lands—
past an Esso station, bathed in its unreal light—
past a small grocery, in its window a giant clock
with greenly glowing hands—
under the whispering branches
of elms—

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The air is warm, thick, full of lilac scent.
The moon floats on the roofs. White stars lean down.
In the distance, familiar lights.
With every step he grows more sure
and brave,
and halfway home, hands tucked in his pockets, he begins whistling.
And when the streetcar going the other way
glides past,
he watches those moving lights
till they disappear, around the far-off bend.

The Romantics

My wife has fallen in love
with Mr. Rochester.

"O Jane! Jane!" he says
as to her heart she presses
that great blind head.

Rudolf Nureyev, move over!
And as for you, Brando,
stay on your side of the bed!

The mattress slumps like the back of a two humped camel
with all the weight—
not even counting the girls—
Playboy bunnies, front-row, smiling students, Jane Austen heroines,
packed in like sardines.

Is it any wonder
we tire sometimes of them all,
and with one sweep of a foot
kick them out on the floor
and just lie there—
in those cool, white desert spaces—
touching.

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IRA SADOFF

Shelter Island, 1952

A space opens in the trees,
there's a child in the clearing.
Suits with padded shoulders, "Memories of You,"
twisting on the phonograph. A simple house
with shutters, shaded from the weather, but it's a storm
you remember. The sky crowding in
with gray, a wind so warm it curls
the leaves. Father's out tonight,
you're unsure when he'll return. Mother's
in her slip, sleeping by the fan.

You're supposed to be sleeping too,
in the cellar where it's cool. Instead
you're reading magazines on the bed.
Who knows what you're afraid of?
The screen door opens
and lets no one in. On the roof, branches
are tapping, that's all. The threat
of rain passes, it doesn't justify your fear.
And late tonight, when you're asleep,
father will return, though he'll leave again.
You walk outside, there's no one there
to speak or draw you close. What was it then
the wind left as a gift? The arms
of trees arching toward the ground,
a boy surrounded by the past's debris,
the petals of flowers discarded in their beds.

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Windows

The window's sight is small:
a branch with leaves, some trees
in the background, a dimensionless
sky behind it, wavering with clouds.
Inside, there is less, the home. Its desk,
shapes of furniture, friends, so much idle thought.
The window is a bridge of glass, a surface
to see through, a stranger's face. In its frame
there is an artless picture, a dull form
in slow motion, the psychology of discontent.
There is a window in the hand's palm,
in the drinking glass, in a wife's deceit.
Soon enough, it all adds up. There is a place
where the inner and outer worlds must touch,
but don't. Where yes and no make no sense.
Perhaps the vandal who breaks a window,
the burglar who travels through it, do battle
with boredom, break the surface of the world
as it appears to us. Or at night, when no world
appears beyond the window and we settle for less,
what we see in its reflection is what we want,
but don't believe in, things we couldn't bear to love.

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Suite Française

after Poulenc

Let's recall the saxophone, the ritual
violence of the dance floor,
the tables that rose and fell
around us, the center of attention
we'd become. The tango and the waltz,
hair slicked down, water of gardenia,
water of rose, your petticoat's reflection
shining on my shoe. Boys in the aisles
with knives in their cummerbunds, Gauloises
sleeping on their lips and the gaze
that turned the dance floor to glue.

Wasn't it too much to bear, a longing
for the young, the partners we wanted
to exchange? Outside, on the frigid stairs,
snow on the forsythia and sycamore,
steam from your face dissolved the air.
And on the balcony of no moon, of no stars
and clouds that brought white flakes
to burn your cheek, in the thick harangue
of changing light from the chandeliers,
I thought of you as someone else
longing and dangerous to be kissed.

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A. R. AMMONS

By the Boulder Cluster the Wind

By the boulder cluster the wind
struck up a dust-ghost
  a brothering shade and shadow
and oh I said
that I could live as lively as you
and have
no more to die

and the ghost tore
into a shackling shrub
and failed like sleet,
returning
shape's interference
to clearing

The dust began to rearrange
to a new breeze
and giving up
the intermediate
paradise
I said oh
all things do from their arisings
depart
shingling down
change's eaves-drop

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ROGER SALE

Fairy Tales

FAIRY TALE LITERATURE IS ONE OF THE GREAT KINDS, a body of stories that do, and can do, what no other kind of literature does. They reach back into a dateless time, speak with grave assurance of wishes and fears, harbor no moralizing, no sense of "art," because their ways and means are so varied and so consoling in their knowledge that there are many stories to tell, many ways to tell the "same" story. The term "fairy tale" is of course only a convenience since only a few stories we call by that name contain fairies or elves or leprechauns or similar creatures. It would be a misleading term except that everyone seems instinctively agreed on what a fairy tale is, even though fairy tales blend easily into related kinds, like myths, legends, romances, realistic folk fables, and cautionary tales. "Cinderella," "Sindbad the Sailor," and "Hansel and Gretel" are fairy tales, while the stories of King Arthur, Pandora, Patient Griselda, and The Ancient Mariner are not. There is a Neapolitan tale that is very much like many versions of "The Sleeping Beauty," but the king in this story, when he comes to the empty castle, rapes the sleeping princess. This is not a fairy tale, even though the princess then conceives and bears two children and eventually comes back to life, even though other events as horrible as rape take place in many fairy tales.

The existence of fairy tales is evidence of a cultural oneness throughout the Eurasian continent. Comparative folklorists occupied themselves for years uncovering the characters, events, and motifs that appear, often with only slight changes, in tales told in India, Japan, France, Germany, and Ireland. Of course each people gave the stories different twists and emphases, and most also developed distinctively native or local tales. One of the books on which I was raised contains a Japanese story, "The Tongue-Cut Sparrow," which is similar to the Grimm Brothers' "The Fisherman and His Wife," and another, "The Accomplished and Lucky Teakettle," which is like no other story I am aware of. The various stories about Jack as the killer of giants belong distinctly to the British Isles, while the English "Goldilocks and the Three

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Bears" resembles the Grimms' "Snow White" in its central episode. On the other hand the African and native American stories I have seen belong to other families altogether from the fairy tales of Europe and Asia.

The stories we know are derived from a relatively late period just before they began to be written down and collected, but are descendants of versions that go back into the mists of time, through centuries we somewhat plumply sum up with the term "oral tradition." Furthermore, they reach back still further, to a time once upon a time; two thousand years ago, says the beginning of "The Juniper Tree," or when wishing still did some good, says the beginning of "The Frog Prince." The versions we know were collected, written, and re-written primarily in the two hundred years between Charles Perrault's *Contes du Temps Passé* at the end of the seventeenth century and the *Fairy Books* compiled by Andrew Lang at the end of the nineteenth. But all take us back to a world when only a handful of people outside the church were literate; what came before fairy tales, or before the worlds imagined in them, the tellers knoweth not.

The ancientness of the tales, their curious persistence in so many different countries, their testimony to the strength of an oral tradition now all but gone, all serve to make them a literature that latter-day people need to treat with great care and respect, if they are going to know it at all. Perrault himself was just such a latter-day person, given to making the tales wittier and more courtly than he found them. But clearly, the earlier the writer, or the closer the writer to the oral traditions, the better or less bruising is the result. The piercingly beautiful tales of Madame D'Aulnoy and Madame de Beaumont, who lived in Perrault's time and shortly thereafter, are distinctly written tales, but they so closely resemble and so fully respect other, older, told tales that few people now know or care that "Green Snake" or "Beauty and the Beast" have actual authors. By comparison Hans Christian Andersen, writing more than a hundred years later, had a more difficult time. He was raised in a village where the tales were still told, but he spent his adult life in Copenhagen were he was often humiliated in ways that not only led to bitterness about people of higher rank and pretension but that distorted some of his best stories into satire and moralizing; even "The Snow Queen," which I take to be his masterpiece is marred by nagging preachiness around its edges. But Andersen, troubled

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and vain though he was, was always an oral teller, and when we come down yet another century, to something like the fairy tales of C. S. Lewis, we see the damage caused when fairy tales are stories to be read from books; Lewis had a true and catholic love of older things, and a great longing to be part of their world, but the ear and the instinct just were not there, and his Narnia stories, popular though they are for latter-day audiences, are brittle and mechanical and subtly preachy in ways older fairy stories never are.

Many of us grew up with fairy stories, reading them and having them read to us, and this gave a latter-day inheritance that must be treasured. Many others learned the stories shallowly, either by knowing only a few stories or by learning them through contemporary versions like Walt Disney's. Many such people end up thinking of fairy tales as romances for children and misread the ancientness of the tales into fantasies of some paradise. My students, for instance, tend to be unhappy when they read in Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty" the light, witty dialogue of European royalty; they are unhappier still when they read in the Grimms' "Sleeping Beauty" about horses and scullery boys and even flies going to sleep and waking up after a hundred years. That is not like Disney, nor, should they know it, Tchaikovsky's ballet. Finally there is perhaps the majority of the population, people who have no fairy tale inheritance and see no particular need for one.

Fairy tales are important because they are irreplaceable, but when a tradition fades until it can be recovered only imperfectly, and by isolated individuals, damage is inevitable, to the reader and to the tale. When many people shared the tradition, even in the latter days when it was more a written than an oral tradition, the sharing could help free the literature from being a matter of individual taste; it led to enough stories being familiar so that the intent and impact of each could be felt and understood; it discouraged the distortion caused when fairy tale literature became thought of as children's literature. Most important—since fairy tales are about the mysterious relations of wishes to fears—when isolated readers cannot share the tales with others, then the delicate balance between the wishes and the fears is easily tipped and the result is a reader who thinks fairy tales are daydream wishes or nightmare fears when in fact they are neither.

Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*, which carries as its subtitle "The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales" is an

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important book in this context for a number of reasons.[1] First, the stature of its author is sufficiently great that it is bound to gain a larger audience than perhaps any book about fairy tales has ever had. Second, Bettelheim is very clear that fairy tales do what no other literature does, and wants very much to show how they can be thought of so as best to become again the inheritance of many people. Third, Bettelheim is very good about children, about their wishes and fears. But unfortunately, Bettelheim is a mechanical and clumsy critic, and he is so convinced of his message that he fails to remember except occasionally that fairy tales are of a world far older than his early twentieth century and psychoanalytic Vienna. He is also extremely long-winded and not given to see that what he is saying is often pretty obvious. Nonetheless, his book offers an excellent opportunity for seeing the possibilities for illuminating commentary on this ancient literature.

Bettelheim is a psychologist, and his ideal audience is latter-day parents who need to be informed about their children:

> From an adult point of view and in terms of modern science, the answers which fairy stories offer are fantastic rather than true. As a matter of fact, these solutions seem so incorrect to many adults—who have become estranged from the ways in which young people experience the world—that they object to exposing children to such "false" information. However, realistic explanations are usually incomprehensible to children, because they lack the abstract understanding required to make sense of them. While giving a scientifically correct answer makes adults think they have clarified things for the child, such explanations leave the young child confused, overpowered, and intellectually defeated. A child can derive security only from the conviction that he understands what baffled him before—never from being given facts which create *new* uncertainties. (pp. 47–48)

I am not a psychologist; I have been a child and a father to children, and have read fairy tales as a child and as an adult. I don't think I am quite as simple or as obtuse as Bettelheim's "adult" here, nor do I really know anyone who is. But I am quite sure I have given a "scientifically correct answer" to a child on the probably mistaken assumption I could thereby clarify something. I certainly have left children confused, overpowered, and intellectually defeated, and have left myself in the same state when I have done so. Not being an ancient teller of tales, I always felt clumsy when confronted by a child afraid, of the dark, of the

[1] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Knopf, 1976).

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looming, of the unknown, of the future. So to this extent I feel part of Bettelheim's audience.

And on one score I feel moved to applaud Bettelheim's care and shrewdness:

> Parents who wish to deny that their child has murderous wishes and wants to tear things and even people into pieces believe that their child must be prevented from engaging in such thoughts (as if this were possible). By denying access to stories which implicitly tell the child that others have the same fantasies, he is left to feel that he is the only one who imagines such things. This makes his fantasies really scary. On the other hand, learning that others have the same or similar fantasies makes us feel that we are a part of humanity, and allays our fear that having such destructive ideas has put us beyond the common pale. (p. 122)

This seems to me the best paragraph in Bettelheim's book, and, fortunately, its spirit animates a good deal of his whole enterprise. In fairy tales the delicate balance between wishes and fears means the wishes can be gratified without being indulged; not only is the desire for revenge accommodated in them, but the desire of the younger or the not-so-bright child to win out, the desire to acknowledge greed, or a fear of sex.

I am sceptical that fairy tales will in these latter days consistently have the salutary effects on children that Bettelheim imagines. Their peculiar sanity, however, even as we see them across the abyss of centuries, is such that no harm will be done if reading *The Uses of Enchantment*[2] stimulates people to rush out and buy collections. But such people are to be forgiven if they do not find in these tales what Bettelheim finds, because of his laborious and assured insistence that child psychology provides all one needs to understand fairy stories. Bettelheim was born in Vienna in 1903 and received his doctorate from the University of Vienna; his psychology is unabashedly Freudian. He knows, to be sure, that Freud's

[2] I wish I could recommend particular books, but can't. Bettelheim believes books without illustrations work best, and the book through which I learned the tales had very few. However, my children learned many tales from a stunning thing called *The Fairy Tale Book*, with a variety of stories translated by Marie Ponset and beautifully illustrated by Adrienne Segur. Unfortunately, Simon and Schuster let this go out of print. The most important point, I think, is to avoid watered-down translations and books in which the illustrations overwhelm the stories. For some hard-headed, untheoretical advice about what stories to read when, and about what makes certain versions disastrously wrong, see Elizabeth Cook, *The Ordinary and the Fabulous*.

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symbols for our inner life—id, ego, superego—are fictions, "useful only for sorting out and comprehending mental processes." But Bettelheim is addicted to symbols, as we shall see, and only occasionally does he avoid mistaking the symbol for a fact. For instance, the hero of "The Three Languages" first learns the language of dogs, then that of birds, and finally that of frogs. Bettelheim wants to equate the animals with Freud's three major fictions, so as to read: dog-ego, bird-superego, frog-id. To do that he must write sentences like these:

> It would seem that dogs represent the ego of man—that aspect of his personality closest to the surface of the mind, since it has as its function the regulation of man's relation to others and to the world around him. Dogs have since prehistory served somewhat this function, aiding man in fending off enemies as well as showing him new ways of relating to savage and other beasts. (p. 100)

Needless to say, the dogs in "The Three Languages" don't behave very much like the dogs in Bettelheim's sentences, but since they don't behave unlike them either, Bettelheim feels free to avoid asking if Freud's fictions are relevant here at all.

Fairy tales, with their many variations on repeated motifs and scenes and characters, may seem ideal for yielding meanings embedded symbolically in what is so insistently repeated. Bettelheim does a good deal of "reading" of things and characters as symbols, and we must return later to see what such readings reveal. But Bettelheim is not at all content to find meanings for dogs or numbers or stepmothers or drops of blood. He seeks, rather, to see the entire narrative of the tales as patterns in the development of children, so each event is made to correspond to a stage in the development of a child. Thus he writes concerning an event late in "Hansel and Gretel":

> The children do not encounter any expanse of water on their way in. Having to cross one on their return symbolizes a transition, and a new beginning on a higher level of existence (as in baptism). Up to the time they have to cross this water, the children have never separated. The school-age child should develop consciousness of his personal uniqueness, of his individuality, which means he can no longer share everything with others, has to live to some degree by himself and stride out on his own. This is symbolically expressed by the children not being able to remain together in crossing the water. (p. 164)

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Since the episode is probably not familiar to everyone, let me quote it, from Randall Jarrell's translation:

> "Now it's time for us to go. We must get out of this enchanted forest," said Hansel. But when they'd walked for a couple of hours they came to a wide lake. "We can't get across," said Hansel. "There isn't a plank or a bridge anywhere."
>
> "There isn't a boat either," answered Gretel, "but there's a little white duck swimming over there—if I ask her to, she will help us over." Then she cried:
>
> "They haven't a bridge and they haven't a plank
> Hansel and Gretel are out of luck.
> Please take us across to the other bank
> And we'll thank you so, you little white duck."
>
> The duck did come over to them, and Hansel sat down on her back and told his sister to sit beside him. "No," answered Gretel, "It would be too heavy for the little duck. She can take us over one at a time."

The episode is not required by the story, which is why one notes that fact while reading but then soon forgets the scene. Giving Bettelheim all one possibly can, one might call the episode a transition; in no way is it anything like a new beginning, or a baptism. There is hardly a separation between Hansel and Gretel at all here, yet Bettelheim is so intent on his point about school-age children that he distorts the scene and overlooks the fact that the children were much more fully and painfully separated in the witch's house than here, when Hansel was put in the cage to be fattened and Gretel was crushed into servitude.

If one doesn't have to make the scene fit a pattern of child development, one is bound to have a different sense of the scene from Bettelheim. The worst is obviously over after Hansel and Gretel leave the house of the witch; the lake, the duck, and especially Gretel's assured kindness, could not, one is quite sure, have come before the climactic scenes with the witch. To that extent we can agree the children are older, or at least more in command. But Bettelheim's insistence on patterns misses the relaxed ease of the scene, the ease both in Gretel and in the storytelling. Because it isn't relevant to the main outline of the story, it comes as a kind of reward, piquant because the major reward lies in the final return home. The non-human world is no longer a forest but a lake, and a duck that comes if called and is large enough to serve as a ferry, if only for one at a time. One goes on wondering what prompted the

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storyteller to include it, but in its small way it is nice to have, the things and events easily arrangeable.

Bettelheim starts, thus, not as a reader of fairy tales but as a determined user of them; after a while one begins to feel the grimness of the second word of the title. Bettelheim seems most of the time indifferent to the fact that early twentieth century Vienna is latter day, practically our contemporary society, when compared to the world in which fairy tales themselves were spawned and grown. Fairy tales are often about children, but they were made in a world that had a very different sense of what it was to be young, because, in most important ways, childhood had not yet been invented. That invention coincides with the years when fairy tales were first written, collected, and began to be told exclusively to children, and childhood as a stage of life happened when what we now think of as the traditional family took its shape. At the end of his great and painstaking work on the subject, Philip Ariès puts it this way:

> In the Middle Ages, at the beginning of modern times, and for a long time after in the lower class, children were mixed with adults as soon as they were considered capable of doing without their mothers or nannies, not long after a tardy weaning (in other words, at about the age of seven). They immediately went straight into the great community of men, sharing in the work and play of their companions, old and young alike . . . (*Centuries of Childhood* [Vintage edition], p. 411)

What Ariès is describing is a world that worked with the most rudimentary—as we might think of it—conception of maturity as a physical matter; if there were stages in the growth of children they were simple, biologically oriented, and two: infancy and after infancy. This is the world which made fairy tales, and it is not a world in need, as Bettelheim's world is, of careful calibration of the stages of growing or maturing.

Because children were thought of as either nursing infants or small adults, families did not have the importance they later came to have in a more bourgeois society:

> The family fulfilled a function; it ensured the transmission of life, property, and names; but it did not penetrate very far into human sensibility. Myths such as courtly and precious love denigrated marriage, while realities such as the apprenticeship of children loosened the emotional bond between parents and children. . . . New sciences such

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> as psychoanalysis, pediatrics and psychology devote themselves to the problems of childhood, and their findings are transmitted to parents by way of a mass of popular literature. Our world is obsessed by the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood. (p. 411)

That is, in the last three or four centuries children have stayed at home longer than they did in earlier centuries, and families have become more important as they have become isolated one from another into separate units. Childhood as we know it. perhaps we could add the family as we know it, is a relatively recent invention, one that postdates fairy tale literature.

Anyone who looks at pictures, of the Seven Ages of Man, say, or of portraits of royal and noble children done before the seventeenth century, sees that point made very clearly. In these pictures there are no children as we think of them, but babes in arms, and people of varying heights all of whom have adult faces; people the age of what we call children look like what we call midgets. Ariès adds to this evidence a great deal, concerning clothing, the construction of domestic dwellings, and, above all, schools, to show that before the seventeenth century, and at most levels of society before the late eighteenth century, the creature we know as "the child" did not exist. After this, within the last few centuries, games, songs, and stories which had hitherto been the property of the community became "for children," and, gradually, stages in the development of people between the ages of four and five to fifteen began to be created and enforced.

To the extent that childhood does not exist in a society, to the extent that families fulfill only biological and legal functions, to that extent Freud's psychology, as we and Bruno Bettelheim conceive it, is less relevant, and useful, if at all, only with the utmost caution and scepticism. What is perhaps most distressing about *The Uses of Enchantment* is that it seems totally unaware of this great potential danger of historical provinciality. Bettelheim, as he addresses an American audience of the late twentieth century, equipped with the expertise of the European psychology of almost a century ago, feels that he is in the position of the sage when he speaks about the importance of fairy tales, but he never once imagines that he might himself be a latter-day reader of those tales, much in need of historical knowledge and scepticism. The idea that the dogs in "The Three Languages" symbolize the ego, or, even more, that

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Hansel and Gretel "develop" or "mature" during the course of the story is one that could not have been conceived of when these stories were created, and it much behooves any latter-day commentator to question himself much more strongly than Bettelheim has done before casually assuming that because fairy tales can be made to "work" according to some latter-day scheme, they therefore should be spoken of in the terms of that scheme.

There is a pretty instance of this in an 1820 work called *The Parental Instructor* which is included in an interesting collection of early English children's literature edited by Leonard DeVries, called *Flowers of Delight*. Here Charles and Mary Elliott have asked their father to tell them a fairy tale, "Cinderella, Ass-Skin, Tom Thumb, or Bluebeard":

> "What!" said Mr. Elliott, "at your age—would you wish me to relate stories which have not even the shadow of common sense in them? It would be ridiculous to see a great big boy of ten years of age, and a young lady of nine, listening, with open mouths, to the adventures of an Ogre who ate little children, or the Little Gentleman with his Seven League Boots; I could only pardon it in a child, who requires to be rocked asleep by his nurse."

Now, to be sure, by our lights Mr. Elliott has it all wrong, resembling as he does Mr. Gradgrind and others who fell too easily and literally under the shadow of Bentham. Mr. Elliott, we see, has at least the rudiments of a latter-day sense of the development of children toward maturity; Charles and Mary are not infants who use fairy tales as pacifiers, nor are they adults who know better than to want to hear fairy tales; they are latter-day children, great big boy of ten and young lady of nine, in need of being told at what point in their development they are.

Now, asked to choose between Mr. Elliott and Bettelheim, I, and I trust anyone else now alive, would eagerly choose Bettelheim. But the point to be stressed here is that Mr. Elliott's wrongness and Bettelheim's rightness are all cut from the same cloth, a cloth that had never been designed or woven until some time after 1650, a cloth of "children," of fairy tales as literature for children of some age, of a psychology about young people that would have struck the oral tellers of fairy tales as being incomprehensible or preposterous. We meet Jesus at about thirty, Hamlet at about twenty, Tom Jones when he is sixteen; they are fascinating people, and so latter-day

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people invariably ask, even when they know better, how they came to be as they are. For their authors, such a question is as irrelevant for them as it is for Adam and Eve. Childhood did not exist. Thus, when we come to look at fairy tale literature, which very clearly often does concern itself with what we call children, we must be extremely cautious not to impose on it an understanding of children that may be vastly superior and more sophisticated than Mr. Elliott's but that may not therefore be any more relevant. Even if, in these latter days, fairy tales can be said to exert a useful and beneficent psychological effect on children, which I believe to be true but not in the way or to the extent that Bettelheim does, that is no reason not to move with great scepticism and humility when we make our attempts to understand these tales.

Fortunately, the most important requisite for recovering something like a decent sense of fairy tale literature is one that anyone, child or adult, can fulfill: to read one story well, one must read many stories, some that resemble it very closely, others that resemble it not at all, and read without any sense that one is trying to prove this or understand that. The great cure for historical provinciality, which is a defect to which all are liable and from which relatively few ever seek to escape, is simply receptiveness, and the love of being receptive. One needs lots of stories about young men leaving home before one can see what is distinctive about the opening of "The Goose Girl," where it is the princess who leaves and the prince who is passive; one needs to read from *The Thousand and One Nights* in order to realize how little do most European tales rely on magic objects and magic conveyances; one needs to build up a vocabulary of objects and events, such as getting lost in a forest, or a stepmother, in order to be alert to the distinctive use some stories make of these familiar things. Fairy tales are told almost without remark or interpretive commentary, and atmospheric effects or other similar signals are almost entirely absent. In order to know what a given story is emphasizing, one learns the other ways this story might be told, the other uses that were made of frequently repeated motifs, characters, and events.

A girl is in a wood. Give her a brother and one has "Hansel and Gretel," give her many brothers and sisters and she becomes less important, and one has "Hop o' My Thumb." Send the girl to dwarves, and one has "Snow White," to bears and one has "Goldilocks," to grandmother and one has "Little Red Riding Hood." Make the girl a boy and one has Jack, a man and one has "The

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Wonderful Musician." Now then, what is the wood? Does it mean anything, symbolize anything, suggest anything? Well yes, of course, because in the wood one can get lost, or encounter known or unknown dangers, and this happens so often in a wood that one begins to make the easy associations, so that when these associations are denied or ignored, as in "The Wonderful Musician," one is quickly aware of it. But forests in fairy tales are so frequent, and their associations so obvious, that they come to seem a given, not unlike the opening chord in a piece of music that can be played loudly or softly, by this or that instrument or the ensemble. It is, thus, important, because the story could not proceed without it, but the last thing one needs to do is to ponder what it means, because what it means will be what is made of it. After each other change in the story, especially in the character of the person in the wood, the wood itself will become tinged slightly, but it will never be anything in itself other than a forest, a place where one is liable to become lost, a place where princes never live but woodcutters often do and witches or wolves may be found.

Or we can take another motif, one that seems more obviously linked with certain facts that are more apparently susceptible to interpretations that we associate with the psychological development of children. "Snow White" opens with a queen pricking her finger and wishing for a child; "Rapunzel" opens with a couple wishing vainly for a child until a witch from whom the husband has stolen rampion announces a child will be born to them; "The Sleeping Beauty" opens with a childless couple, and a frog announces to the wife while she is bathing that she will become pregnant; "The White Deer" opens with the same announcement being made by a shrimp which then turns into a handsome old woman; "Kip, the Enchanted Cat" starts off with a queen and a cat, and the cat has a kitten before she tells the queen she too will have a baby. The reason so many couples are childless at the opening of fairy tales is probably nothing more than the fact that women "in those days," especially women of a lower class, came to puberty much later than women in latter days, and so in many cases would have been married before they could bear children. The reason most of the children given to hitherto childless couple are girls is something we can touch on later.

We now have a motif, and, like the motif of being lost in the woods, it is so common that after a while we almost cease to notice it, and alert ourselves for the changes each story will derive from

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this motif. We don't stop to say that women in fairy tales want children, or seem to need them to feel fulfilled, or sometimes will do strange and dangerous things to have a child, because it seems altogether obvious. When, in connection with many of these women we have drops of blood used to announce the pregnancy, we don't feel required to make this blood specifically symbolic; in these stories, when the wife pricks her finger or cuts her hand, she almost certainly will die in childbirth, so we associate the blood with the sacrificial and fulfilling death, just as we might, in stories where it is an unmarried maiden rather than a wife whose finger is pricked, associate the blood with the onset of puberty, or, as the stories have it, with the impending meeting with a young swain. But the associations become automatic not because we have interpreted the motifs but because we have seen the range of events that transpire when motifs of a certain sort are used. Gradually, thus, we can become better readers, able to recognize the familiar repeated actions or characters, able thus to see how each individual story works its will with them by means of different combinations or unexpected variations.

Here, for instance, is the opening of "The Juniper Tree," a story told by the Grimms, sometimes called "The Almond Tree":

> It is a long time ago now, as much as two thousand years maybe, that there was a rich man and he had a wife and she was beautiful and good, and they loved each other very much but they had no children even though they wanted some so much, the wife prayed and prayed for one both day and night, and still they did not and they did not get one. In front of their house was a yard and in the yard stood a juniper tree. Once, in wintertime, the woman stood under the tree and peeled herself an apple, and as she was peeling she cut her finger and the blood fell on the snow. "Ah," said the woman and sighed a deep sigh, and she looked at the blood before her and her heart ached. "If only I had a child as red as blood and as white as snow." And as she said it, it made her feel very happy, as if it really were going to happen. And so she went into the house, and a month went by, the snow was gone; and two months, and everything was green; and three months, and the flowers came up out of the ground; and four months, and all the trees in the woods sprouted and the green branches grew dense and tangled with one another and the little birds sang so the woods echoed, and the blossoms fell from the trees; and so five months were gone, and she stood under the juniper tree and it smelled so sweet her heart leaped and she fell on her knees and was beside herself with happiness; and when six months had gone by, the fruit grew round and heavy and she was very still; and seven months, and she snatched the juniper berries and ate them so greedily she became sad and ill; and so the eighth month went by, and she called

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her husband and cried, "When I die, bury me under the juniper." And she was comforted and felt happy, but when the nine months were gone, she had a child as white as snow and as red as blood and when she saw it she was so happy that she died. (translated by Lore Segal)

Nothing here is unfamiliar, yet it all is put together to make something unique. Tolkien calls this opening "exquisite and tragic," which it certainly is, and of all the stories that begin with childless couples and the birth of children, this is the only one that can properly be called that.

The cues begin early, with the wife being both beautiful and good, with the couple loving each other very much, with the wife praying—if we have read other stories of childless couples these unsurprising details will stand out a bit because they are absent elsewhere, and we note each one softens the wife and makes her unincidental. We note the pricking of the finger, see the details are almost identical to those in "Snow White," but the similarity only serves to set off the differences; in "Snow White" the husband is barely mentioned, and, more strikingly, there is no tree, no incantatory rolling out of spring, summer, and harvest to follow. Indeed, the opening of "The Juniper Tree" is exquisite and tragic because the natural cycle enfolds the wife so that her life is fulfilled within one turn of the seasons; she is but a flower that glides, and we recognize and feel this not because of what the wife shares with all the other childless wives but because of those emphases that set this story apart from others similar to it. If we speak of the power of the blood, the power of the tree, the power of natural rhythms, we are really speaking of the literary power of the teller of this tale who, knowing all the openings of all the stories with childless couples, takes the material common to all such stories and turns it in a distinctive way.

The story then seems to change direction, and the tone changes radically. The child is a boy, and, after his father remarries and the stepmother becomes terrible, for once she consummates her revenge and murders the boy. More striking still, the stepmother is a guilt-ridden blunderer who scurries around, puts the boy's head back on his shoulders, places the blames for the murder on her own daughter, whom she loves, and serves the boy to his father in a stew. All this contrasts sharply with the exquisite and tragic beginning, and also with the cleverer and more diabolical stepmothers of other stories, so that we see this stepmother as both more brutal and less sinister. The effect of both these contrasts is, oddly, to

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show us how the story continues to be about the juniper tree. The boy is just a boy, the stepmother blunders in a recognizable and ordinary household, and his facelessness and her clumsiness keep the people from having anything like the stature of Snow White and her stepmother. Thus, when the daughter places the boy's bones under the tree, and her heart is immediately happy, and out of the tree flies a bird, we notice how the daughter's actions parallel those of the first wife, and, in noticing this, see how the tree has changed its powers from natural to extra-natural without changing itself. The bird "is" the boy, and flies around the village cheerfully singing a song about its own murder, bargaining for objects with which to console and reward the father and daughter and to punish the stepmother; the bird sings its final songs from the branches of the juniper tree, and, its mission completed, it leaves the tree in a flame and becomes the boy again. The tree is not Yeats's great-rooted blossomer, and in this story body is consistently bruised to pleasure soul, but the power of the human beings is sufficiently limited and that of the tree held sufficiently mysterious that it is and becomes both the dancer and the dance.

To ask what this tree symbolizes, as one believes Bruno Bettelheim would have felt compelled to do had he discussed the story, would be to harm it. Like all fairy tales "The Juniper Tree" is told too literally, too matter-of-factly, for the teller to meditate on such matters or to encourage our doing so. The teller's strength derives from the knowledge that we know many stories that begin with a childless couple, and that we will see the tree is more than just another announcer of a pregnancy. Knowing that, we attend to the tree more carefully every time it appears. The powerful effect the tree can have on us derives from teller and audience both knowing how other apparently similar stories go, but "symbol" is not a helpful term here, any more than it is for anything else in older literature. The tree is a tree, yet the most powerful tree in fairy tale literature. Out of it come juniper berries, and a bird, and alongside it a baby is conceived, a child's heart is made happy, and a boy is resurrected. For such wonders "symbol" is about as useful a term as "magic" or "natural" or "religious."

I hope this way of describing "The Juniper Tree" as a story whose rare, eerie power derives in large measure from our awareness of the many stories it is not, so that we may more clearly recognize the way the details make it the story it is, can put us in a

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position to look rather carefully at "Snow White," a more familiar tale, and one of Bettelheim's central exhibits. With it I think we can recover a fuller sense of the life lived in those ancient worlds out of which these stories came, and thereby add a kind of historical sense to the more strictly literary sense I have tried to argue for and use up to now.

The point about "Snow White," in contrast to "The Juniper Tree" and to many other fairy tales, is that here the relation of the older to the younger woman is central. Just as the opening of "The Juniper Tree" made us note the importance of the wife and the tree and the seasons, so in "Snow White" we first note the distinctive details of the stepmother's mirror and the announcement that Snow White begins to be her rival when she is aged seven. This makes the stepmother important, and her relation to Snow White important, and diminishes everything else in the tale. Envy is the queen's feeling, not jealousy; there is no third person here to be jealous about. Knowing Snow White's father is practically not in the story at all, Bettelheim has to find one:

> A weak father is as little use to Snow White as he was to Hansel and Gretel. The frequent appearance of such figures in fairy tales suggests that wife-dominated husbands are not exactly new to this world. More to the point, it is such fathers who either create unmanageable difficulties in the child or fail to help him solve them. This is another example of the important messages fairy tales contain for parents. (p. 206)

This is another example of quite a few things, including Bettelheim's distressing habit of referring to all children as "he" or "him." Out of context a reader would not know what "weak father" Bettelheim is talking about, but in fact it is the huntsman sent to kill Snow White who is being given the lecture. Of course the huntsman can hardly be said to have created Snow White's "unmanageable difficulties," and, if he doesn't help her "solve" them—such a wrong word, "solve," when we think of Snow White's situation in the forest—he does the essential thing to keep her alive.

Nor do matters improve when Bettelheim comes to the queen:

> Now, if the queen's purpose was to kill Snow White, she could easily have done so at this moment, [when she laces Snow White and suffo-

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> cates her]. But if the queen's goal was to prevent her daughter from surpassing her, reducing her to immobility is sufficient for a time. The queen, then, stands for a parent who temporarily succeeds in maintaining his dominance by arresting his child's development. (pp. 211–212)

This may be Bettelheim's lowest point. If the text is momentarily silent on the queen's intentions here, she has already eaten the lungs and liver of what she takes to be Snow White, and with the poisoned comb and apple that follow the text is clear that the intention is not just to "arrest his[sic] child's development." But Bettelheim, who never stoops actually to quoting a text, and whose eye is always on twentieth century children, renders himself helpless when faced with this most impressive queen.

In a review of *The Uses of Enchantment* Harold Bloom is clear how Bettelheim's training has betrayed him as a reader of "Snow White," and he offers what at first glance seems an interesting counter-reading:

> What kind of story is "Snow White," when an adult encounters it in a good translation of the Grimms? It is about as uncanny as Coleridge's "Christabel," would be an accurate answer, and it is hardly a paradigm for the process of maturing beyond Oedipal conflicts, as Bettelheim wants it to be. Snow White's mother, like Christabel's, dies in childbirth. The relations between her wicked and disguised stepmother and Snow White, during the three attempts to murder the girl, are about as equivocal as the Sapphic encounters between Geraldine and Christabel. Trying to kill a girl by successively tight-lacing her, combing her hair with a poisoned comb, and sharing a partly poisoned apple with her—all these testify to a mutual sexual attraction between Snow White and her stepmother. The stepmother's desire to devour the liver and lungs of Snow White is demonic in itself, but takes on a particularly uncanny luster in the primal narcissism of a tale dominated by mirrors. When the tale ends, the wicked stepmother, dressed in her most beautiful clothes, has danced herself to death in red-hot slippers at the wedding feast of Snow White, a horror that is an expressive emblem of her frustrated desires. (*New York Review of Books*, July 15, 1976)

What is most salutary about Bloom's reading is that it goes precisely to those points where an experienced reader of fairy tales has noted distinctive details: the mirror, the desire to eat the lungs and liver, the three temptations, the "punishment" of the stepmother at the end. But Bloom, already as blinkered in his way by his conviction that fairy tales are romances as Bettelheim in his that they always lie down easily in his procrustean Freudian bed, doesn't

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really look carefully enough at what he identifies as the most distinctive moments.

No need here to look at them all, but we cannot ignore the mirror, mirror on the wall; this is a tale about the desire to be the fairest of them all. The term "narcissism" carries with it too many different possible emphases to be the only one we want. In the story, for instance, there is no suggestion that the queen's absorption in her beauty ever gives her pleasure, or that the desire for power through sexual attractiveness is itself a sexual feeling. What is stressed is the anger and fear that attends the queen's realization that as she and Snow White both get older, she must lose. That is why the feeling is envy, not jealousy: to make beauty that important is to reduce the world to one in which only two people can count.

But this hardly makes "Christabel" a relevant analogue; I would have thought that on the face of it something else was suggested, since for all intents and purposes the queeen and Snow White never look at each other. That Snow White's mother, like Christabel's, died in childbirth is of course irrelevant given the number of such deaths in other fairy tales. That the stepmother wants to eat Snow White's lungs and liver is not, though the desire need not extend beyond wanting to include Snow White's beauty and power within herself, and whatever sexual feeling is involved in that is included in the original passion to be fairest. Then we come to the three temptations, where Snow White is at last able to choose. On the first visit we are told (the translation is Lore Segal's): "Snow White hadn't the least suspicion, and let the old woman lace her up with new laces"; on the second visit: "It looked so nice to the child she let herself be fooled, and opened the door. . . . Poor Snow White didn't suspect anything, and let the old woman do as she pleased." Whatever we might say the stepmother wants, it is clear that what Snow White wants is to be laced, to have her hair combed, and finally to eat the poisoned apple. Her attention is directed toward what will make her beautiful, what will make her sexual, and I see no reason why that desire must carry with it any desire for the disguised old woman or the wicked stepmother beneath the disguise. Against the charm of what she is offered, Snow White is defenseless, not so much because she is innocent as because she is charmed.

As for the stepmother, it seems equally distorting to say she is attracted to Snow White. What she wants is what Snow White has,

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the beauty of a young woman, but the whole intensity of the desperate competition is more eerie if it isn't tilted from the desire for Snow White's beauty toward the desire for Snow White herself:

> "Are you afraid of poison?" said the old woman. "Look, I'll cut the apple in two halves, you eat the red cheek and I'll eat the white." But the apple was so cunningly made that only the red part was poisoned. Snow White longed for the lovely apple, and when she saw that the old woman was eating it, she couldn't resist it any longer, put out her hand, and took the poisoned half.

No need here to speak as Bettelheim does at length about the sexual symbolism of apples in Eden or ancient Troy; the red of the apple is the red of the blood with which the tale opens. But we can say, and agree with Bettelheim, that Snow White can want and be afraid of the sexuality implicit in the blood of the apple without saying she wants the one who gives her the apple. That way we can see Snow White's desire in the same light as we see the queen's; it is for beauty, for sexual power, as goals in themselves. It is not a demonic desire as we see it in Snow White, though we know it is a fearful wish indeed, laden with danger and the potentiality to become like the stepmother.

My guess is that the story finally is a good deal more grim than Bettelheim imagines, and also a good deal less gaudy and more earth-bound than Bloom imagines. Let's for a moment present the view of the world of fairy tale literature offered by "Snow White," then step back to see what other stories do to confirm or modify that view. We know that in this world the primary task for women was bearing children; second, child bearing was often fatal; third, whatever other power women had lay in youth and beauty. After a brief blossoming during and after puberty, most of the palliatives against a grim and crimped existence were controlled by men, though men in fairy tales usually are dutiful, stolid people, bowed, restricted to work and food and small pleasures. But because their power was not primarily a sexual power, men in fairy tales never develop an envious murderous passion against younger men; whatever power men have does not erode with time.

Snow White's stepmother, thus, is involved in a struggle she must lose, to Snow White, but primarily to time. It is frightening because the passion to be fairest seeks no value beyond itself; the queen doesn't want anything or anyone to be fairest for, or with, except her mirror. She has been given only one power, and that one very

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briefly; contrary to all our latter day desires and hopes that sexuality can mature as youth goes and beauty fades, in the world of many fairy tales sex is youth and beauty. For an older woman to fight against these facts and values made her frightening, as no fairy tale can imagine defeating such a woman without also destroying her. Of course there is the counter hope, that both men and women can find mates with whom they can live happily ever after, but when the tales focus on grown people they tend to give us stolid, ineffective men, and frightened and frightening women. Of course, then, Snow White and the Queen are locked in a terrible likeness, because they are the same person at two different stages of life.

Were "Snow White" the only fairy tale, we might have to stop there, but of course it is not. There is in many stories a third figure, the thirteenth Wise Woman in the Grimms' "Sleeping Beauty," the fairy godmother in Perrault's "Cinderella," the Lilac Fairy in his "Donkey-skin," the woman who gives Lisa raspberries in Andersen's "The Wild Swans," and whose voice tells her how to unenchant her brothers. These are mostly substitutes for the good mother who has died bearing children, and in effect they pass on the hopes attendant upon birth or puberty. Their power generally seems weaker than that of the stepmothers, but the wish of the tales is clear that their hopes will nonetheless prevail. Even these good mothers or their surrogates, however, work to reinforce the overwhelming sense that women had to struggle against each other; the wish they represent says no more than the wish that this struggle will not corrupt.

I can locate two responses in myself whenever I spend very much time reading and thinking about fairy tales. Tolkien says at one point in his essay on fairy tales that "they are now *old*, and antiquity has an appeal in itself." My first response, especially with a tale like "Snow White" in mind, is to demur; antiquity has an interest in itself, but not, for me, an appeal. When I think of the world out of which "Snow White" and "The Juniper Tree" and "The Goose Girl" and "Hansel and Gretel" came, I shudder, and am grateful I am not asked to be good, to be me, to be alive in that world. Where Bettelheim seems to feel his psychological machinery can bridge the gap over the centuries almost as though it were not there, I know it is, and am relieved much of the time. Others, I know, respond most strongly to fairy tales for their purity, for the brightness of their sense of beauty and good and the darkness of their sense of jealousy and unrequited desire; I tend, even as I feel

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that, to back off, to rejoice in the impurities of my world, where the lines are not so straightly drawn and the fates not so inevitable. I am more drawn to latter day fairy tales where romance has entered in, like "Beauty and the Beast" and "The Snow Queen" than to the sterner, older, tales. "Rumpelstiltskin," for instance, always makes me edgy and annoyed. There are three men in the story, and it is not the miller who boastingly vaunts his daugher into peril, or the avaricious and cruel king who marries her, but the little man who helps her out and wants only a child for himself who is singled out for punishment. As I contemplate the wishes and fears that went into the making of that story, I am warmed to remember that I do not myself much paticipate in them, and the reason for that is not just that I am not a young woman. The story has its hateful power, to be sure, but it is the power of the alien insistence that kings must always be accepted and even married, no matter how dreadful, and that little men in the woods must always be thwarted, no matter how sympathetic. I always dreaded that story as a child, and I am glad I now know why. By comparison, the one Grimm story I always liked is "The Golden Bird," because I too was a not so bright younger son, and I was always relieved that such creatures could blunder and blunder and still come out all right. With this one story, I could be the child Bettelheim imagines all children to be with all fairy tales.

But that is not my only response; if it were I would not go back to fairy tales again and again as I do. I can begin to describe it by referring to Tolkien's statement about "The Juniper Tree" that "such stories have now a mythical or total (unanalysable) effect . . . they open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself maybe" (*Tree and Leaf*, p. 32). Then let me add this from Elizabeth Cook, setting herself a task similar to the one Bettelheim set himself:

> There is another door that can be opened by reading legends and fairy tales, and for some children, at the present time, there may be no other key to it. *Religio*, in one Latin sense of the word, implies a sense of the strange, the numinous, the totally Other, of what lies quite beyond human personality and cannot be found in any human relationships. This kind of 'religion' is an indestructible part of the experience of many human minds, even though the temper of a secular society does not encourage it, and the whole movement of modern theology runs counter to it. (*The Ordinary and the Fabulous*, p. 5)

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I am not sure how much of what Tolkien and Cook are referring to lies within my actual experience with fairy tales; I think I wanted them to have that effect on me more than they actually did, or have. But I do have a feeling perhaps analogous to it; fairy tales make me still. They survived through centuries and through transport to many different countries, and the storytellers seem to know this, to feel the strength of the great tree as they are speaking of what happened on one small branch. In one sense it matters very much which version or which translation of a story we read, but in another sense it doesn't matter at all, because each is its own tale, its own branch, and there is no "true" version of any one. That is a power that has either been lost or become so debased in the latter days as to seem uninteresting; it is a power of sharing, of teller and hearer both knowing that each cue, each twist in the tale, is notable because so many other stories are about the events that are not in this particular one; in literature or other "high" arts we call this sharing a matter of conventions, but that seems too conscious, too heavy a term, for the sharing of fairy tales.

I think I knew this fact about fairy tales very early. In one way it is consoling and wonderful, because the apparent arbitrariness, or the obscurity of events and things in fairy tales is all right, since the way a particular story went was only one among many possibilities. With later, written tales taste enters in, but with fairy tales it did not. In another way this fact is simply stilling. I read a collection of fairy tales with absorption and pleasure, never obliged to accept or reject a story because it is or isn't as good as some other, knowing that all are necessary, the testimony of an older time. The position I am describing seems somewhere between the position described by Elizabeth Cook—where one is stilled because confronted with the totally Other—and that of a scholar—where no evidence is too tiny or insignificant to be overlooked. It is testimony I am hearing, because a voice is speaking, and to me, across a large abyss. But it is only a voice, or some voices, not something beyond human personality, not something beyond human relationships; it lies before human personality as we know it, before human relationships as we normally experience them.

If the impulse is not, then, religious or scholastic, it is literary and historical, and is therefore available to anyone who is willing. The literary sense involved is really only getting a feel for particular stories because one has read many, and the historical sense is equally imprecise, makeshift, a matter mostly of seeing just enough

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ways in which fairy tales are like us so that one can be aware of the many ways in which Then is not Now. For a fairy tale to have a total and unanalyzable effect one must give oneself to it, as I think Tolkien did, and I cannot really do. Yet, knowing the effect is irreplaceable and unrepeatable except by another fairy tale, one resists the analyses of Bettelheim because his readings depend so much upon Then being very close to Now. So, in my middle position I try to describe effects carefully, try to avoid bruising the surfaces of the tales, knowing they cannot yield anyway to any analysis of mine. The result ends up at times seeming suspiciously like a summary of a plot, and one wants more than that; if one cannot get that more, however, it is best to acknowledge that fact and not invent machinery which will transform a summary of a plot into a solution, a reading, an analysis.

There is a little fable in the Grimms' collection, a real *hausmärchen*, called "The Death of the Hen." It can't run to much more than three hundred words, but within that span the tale must turn round half a dozen times or more, transforming itself from a cautionary tale to something like the old woman with the pig that wouldn't go over the stile to "Chicken Little" to the friendly beasts, and it ends thus:

> So the cock was left all alone with the dead hen, and he digged a grave and laid her in it, and he raised a mound above her, and sat himself down and lamented so sore that at last he died. And so they were all dead together. (translated by Lucy Crane)

I hope I have not implied that one needs mostly caution as a reader of fairy tales, because, reading this ending, one almost wants to be able to shout that there is nothing like it in the world. Wordsworth's great phrase about Michael, "And he never lifted up a single stone," is practically sweaty in its reaching for poetic effect beside the last line of this story. We are back at the great well of narrative possibility; when one is there the stories can go anywhere because life, crimped and fearful though it be, is wondrous and full and one must accept it all. One minds mortality less when reminded that we will be dead together, with the hen and the cock and the teller of that tale.

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W. S. DI PIERO

Scrimshaw

I carve bone to within an inch of my life.
Two days off Sunday Island,
greasy luck running high,
a nasty squall knocked me silly
against the forward hatch.
If the iron latch had bashed my temple
I'd be dead.

When I thought I'd die
my last thought
was the pie crimper. You're in it,
scratched in a shank of whale-jaw.
Your heartbreaker curls hang heavy as willow boughs
on a windless night.
On the other side
a sperm whale's head upends our longboat
into awful black water.

The sea, this sea, is a bore.
A million years and some slimey thing
crawled out and eventually
became us. But I
figure you on a white sea.
No storm bends your back.
I can slide my hand
down that little scoop of skin and spine
just before your legs branch out.

Old Chips the cook
made up this song:
Death to the living
Long life to killers
Success to sailors' wives

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And greasy luck to whalers.
And I sometimes want to join that sea
and be no more than a bushy sprout
of a sperm whale blank and almighty as God.
In a storm my life feels
it's worth something,
maybe no more than a dead sailor's
chamber in your heart.
Better than nothing.

When I'm home you'll caress yourself
in the kitchen, baking peach pie,
a riot of pies.
Pinch crust with this jagging wheel
and you will know what it's like
to be far from home.
On the heel end I've fashioned
a man's head. Not mine. Who knows
what I really look like? No.
Just a plain male head,
something general for your cupboard
to outlast this cheap
bone paper.

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DAVID R. SLAVITT

Garbage

An etymologic mystery, garbage
is, nevertheless, a teleologic
likelihood of appalling obviousness,
the tendency of

turn sooner or later into things to junk,
scrap, detritus, everywhere evident—
not in just use objects and ornaments, but
ideas and people,

even saints (poor Christopher, for example)
even in the gods (Mazda's a bulb, a car).
The priests of garbage display sectarian
animus, whether

their faith be in the ancient quartet of air,
earth, fire, and water, burning, burying, or
dumping fragrant scowsful into deep places
where we can't see it,

or whether they hold with the oriental
theories of reincarnation, and sort out
aluminum cans, newsprint, rags, and the like,
saving organic

wastes for the compost heap, in the serene hope
of another life—or deviation from
the condition of garbage to which time pulls
with the furies' force

whatever intricate work we do or are
in the dumps's despite. The distillate of years
stands in a dozen liquor cartons in the
premonitory

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guise of the garbage it will soon enough be.
Papers, pictures, books—I shall store some, ship some,
throw much away, but I have been hunting for
some object of worth,

pawing through my own litter, as a cat will
in the hope I may find some treasure, some prize
better than my own dirt. Museums suggest
it happens sometimes,

that somehow or other there can be reprieves
from the great inferno (itself, condemned as
polluting the air). But curators err too,
humans that they are,

so we can all hope. I try to believe in
a God, sifting through all this rubble, and pray
that His hand, gloved and undoubtedly filthy,
discovering me,

may hesitate and, in that instant's pause, let
me imagine what He remembers—that I
was once supposed to fit somewhere, that I was
not always garbage.

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J. R. GRINDLAY

Steal the Dawn

In oily rags hanging
threadbare and unpatched
from slack shoulders
Riding the late freights
the haunted midnight whistle
Empty stations and busted-down shanties
tracks like naked women
shining, open in the huge nights
Greenville Yard, a hundred forgotten trains
abandoned ferries creaking in the moonlight
frogs feet lapping the darkness
and the distant skyline
too big and striking for a dream
His face lined and grey as his whiskers
twisted into a laugh, lost in a cough
while the repair crew labored and swore
"Track spread and she sank right to the axles!"

Riding the crow's nest to Weehawken
with a clear track and a busted door
the jerking rocking sway brings sleep
knowing the nearby slap of the cards
Until rough hands drag you from sleep
"Better drop off here,
the yard's just up ahead."
Shivering, groggy,
the cold darkness swallows you up
stones jolting your feet
when you jump
the rough bandana of the railroad night
wrapped tight over your face

Standing under the huge pilings
of the road to the Lincoln Tunnel

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Staring, open-mouthed, at sudden New York
just across the Hudson
Know, then, that this is your hour,
this is your moment to
cross the river
to a new land
to touch the towers of light
hovering over a dark world
And learn to see with your dreams
instead of your eyes

LEWIS TURCO

The Recurring Dream

for Stanley Kunitz

The Italians most part sleep away care and grief,
if it unreasonably seize upon them.—Burton

I seek my father—that minister
of the deep—among the furniture
of my childhood. I step out of waking
into this room and know
that time has passed. The windows are webbed
and moonstreaked. A lamp with a glass shade,

green and saffron, burns
on a brass stem. The bookcases hold sermons
and silence. My aquaria
stand among tumbled

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tomes and testaments. The dust rises
into the amber darkness.

I disturb a desert of hours,
search for the fish that glide
in musty waters—blue scales
glint under my glance,
their eyes are corals budding
among rusty blades of sea grass

and swordplants. I remove the glass lids
and dip my hand into the water—
it is what I have feared:
shadow of a shadow, dim air
flowing from corner to corner.
The fish rise along the curtains

to swim about me in the air,
their black fins wavering.
I dig in the gravel stranded
among the shelving,
the decaying books. I dig,
and here, in the root

of the largest plant, blooming
from a socket of bone, I find my father
where he has scuttled,
at last to be brought back, smiling.

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JUDITH JOHNSON SHERWIN

The Paradise Avocado

—a talking blues

SHE WAS GROWING AND GROWING. Every branch had to take a long time. Every leaf took a few weeks to lose its shine. She had been doing it a long time. Every day had to put out a new stem to lose its shine. She had been trying and trying. Sometimes she didn't know how to take a long time. Every year she knew less of how to lose her shine. The newness rubbed off and then had to be put back on. She had found that powder worked best because it took away the shine. A special kind of green dust would make the glow of youth not last too long. The polished side of each leaf had a tendency to stay so long. People would ask her why are you staying so long and she would say because the party hasn't lost its shine.

She had been staying and staying. She had been doing it till she turned green. Nobody bothered to stop and ask her why are your leaves so long and green. She thought it had something to do with the moisture of the ground she was standing on. The ground she was set in was one which held and held its drink. People would stop and ask and ask her why are you falling around and drooping down. She would say maybe it's because I don't seem to be turning brown. If she could learn how to turn brown too soon she would not have to stay green so long. The ground she was set in was one that made your every root sink.

It was a deadly kind of job to be greening and greening as she stayed. She thought it had something to do with the increasing thickness of her stem. The children sometimes would stop and ask her why is your stem getting so grossly thick. She told them that maybe it had to do with how many things there were to soak up. The shoes and watering cans were all over the floor and the socks would definitely have to be mopped up. She was bending and bending but her stem went right on picking everyone up. Her husband thought maybe it had something to do with her increasing refusal to soak things up. Sometimes when she was feeling green she had a tendency to think she had had enough. Her children

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wanted to know whether she hadn't been with them more than long enough.

She was always doing and doing but her leaves were beginning to get too dry. She thought maybe it had something to do with the rate of drainage of her clay pot. The sun was always shining and that tended to make things hot. She was always gathering drinks in May but the drainage continued at a constant rate. Her husband wanted to know why her leaves were sweeping the ashes out of the flue. She thought maybe it had to do with a feeling of being rootbound in that pot. He thought that maybe it had to do with her not having enough to do. A green young thing needs room to grow even in a chimney she said, even when it's the household mascot it needs a new room for its pot.

Something was growing and growing inside her left leafy stem. It grew and grew until it felt unpleasantly hard under his hand. It grew until she suspected that maybe it might turn out to be a friend. Maybe it should be checked out she suggested but he said the pull of the drainage was all in her mind. Something began to grow and grow and it didn't act like a leafy stem. It pulled and pulled until she suspected maybe it was the roots and vines of children without end. Maybe it better be pruned they decided and her children didn't ask her when. I am growing a little something she said and I hate to cut it off before its time. Never mind, her husband watered her every night, you just haven't lost that leafy shine.

They pruned away her sweetest leaves because they were blocking off the chimney of everybody's sun. You can't stand in the way like that they complained, it's time to let the fresh air in. She had lost her roundest fruit but they couldn't prune away the thick stem. It's time to winter my withers and lay low, she creaked, before I stand in everybody's sweet sun. You just relax said the waterers and we'll clear you off the line. She was growing and growing but the end of growth took a long long time. Tomorrow I'll learn how to stop she said. He said tomorrow you'll be just fine.

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CHARLES W. MILLARD

Hans Hofmann

HANS HOFMANN IS ONE OF THE MOST PUZZLING ARTISTS of the mid-twentieth century. The source of the puzzlement is not Hofmann's work, which is characterized by a power and clarity bespeaking the accomplishment of a great master, but the relative public obscurity of that work, the curious discrepancy between its quality and its creator's reputation, and the consequent ambiguity of Hofmann's reputation as a whole. That reputation rests rather more on Hofmann's accomplishment as a teacher than on his work as a painter, and it is not infrequently said that while Hofmann was a great teacher he was less then a great artist. His public reputation as a painter is nowhere near as great as that of Pollock or de Kooning, for example, a fact reflected in the prices of the works of the three,—and even among those professionally involved with contemporary art one finds Hofmann all too often relegated to second place. Looking to the work itself for explanation, one finds that, like Picasso but with somewhat more qualitative consistency, Hofmann was a protean artist whose works vary a great deal in appearance. Moreover, they deal in complex ways with greater than usual numbers of internal variables, ringing every possible change on combinations of color, shape, paint application, surface texture, etc. Despite the fact that the results of this internal complexity are almost always effects of great simplicity, Hofmann's works resist analysis, demanding to be accepted whole in all their austerity. This resistance of the work to having its secrets unlocked other than in the terms in which it presents itself tends to restrict its popularity, the more so when combined with its apparent lack of consistent style. Moreover, the seeming variety of style in Hofmann's work of the 1960's is the same variety one finds in his work of the 1930's, and if the terms in which those styles are presented differ slightly the problems to which they address themselves are roughly the same. This, too, makes the work resistant to the imposition of ideas from without, specifically to being fitted into periods, and consequently less approachable. Finally, Hofmann was able to synthesize his European training and his American experience in such a way as to create works that look foreign to both Europeans and Americans—as, in another guise, they must look native to both—thereby discouraging familiarity. All of this evidences Hofmann's ability to accept a great deal into his art, an ability that leads him to a constant defiance of expectation that makes his work difficult to grasp for those unwilling to put aside expectation and regard that work for what it is.

Hofmann occupies the happy position of an artist with no surviving professional childhood. The earliest remaining works by him, at least the earliest to be widely known, date from the mid-1930's when he was well into his fifties. One knows, nevertheless, that between 1904 and 1914 he

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was in Paris, where he had extensive contacts with both the Fauves and the Cubists, as well as with a certain number of visiting American artists. Returning to Germany during the First World War, Hofmann renewed his acquaintance with Paris on frequent trips during the 1920's, while maintaining a home base in Munich. He first visited the United States in 1930 to teach in Berkeley at the invitation of a former pupil, and settled here definitively in 1932, thereafter dividing his time between Provincetown and New York. The evidence of his early American work, that from the middle and late '30's, suggests that he found reinforcement for his coloristic interests in German Expressionism, in Kandinsky, and in the work of Matisse. Certain studio interiors of this period indicate a particular indebtedness to the French master. That Hofmann should have been more attracted to Matisse than to the Cubists is not only telling of his own interests, but indicates how prepared he was for an assimilation of the effects of American painting, which were indebted at least as much to Matisse as to other important French contemporaries.

In the early 1940's the sixty-year-old Hofmann produced a series of "landscapes" that clearly indicate the direction he was to follow. Small in size—often 24″ × 30″—and horizontal in format, these pictures are at their best when their paint is most broadly applied, a facture that may or may not mean actual impasto. If they recall German Expressionism in their paint application, their colors are closer to the French tradition than to that of the North. The landscapes themselves are sometimes representationally recognizable and sometimes wholly abstract, but it is always clear that the ultimate referent of the paintings is nature and not the human figure. Those built up of broader brushstrokes are generally superior to those constructed of smaller pictorial elements and they are inevitably, to their benefit, constructed around substantial value differences. Atmospheric effects are inimical to them, as they always were to Hofmann's work, and part of his pictorial problem at this stage was to keep modulated color from assuming the character of shading and atmosphere. That the representational pictures are convincing landscapes devoid of atmospheric depth is an index of Hofmann's abilities in this respect.

About 1943 several changes manifested themselves in Hofmann's work. He began showing a marked preference for vertical or square formats, he partially abandoned brushed compositions in favor of a variety of application including dripping and spattering, and drawing came to play an important role in his compositions. The drawing may well have been partly an effort to control his now larger compositions, with their less defined paint application—he no longer had the mark of the brush on which to depend regularly—and partly a response to the evocative biomorphism of New York painting during the mid-'40's. In pictures such as *Fantasia* (1943), the drawing is a dripped skein of paint that sometimes moves freely over the more broadly applied background and sometimes coincides with the limits of parts of that background to define color areas. In other pictures, such as *Fairy Tale* (1944), it is a more conventional and clearly controlled set of boundaries creating what may be identified as, or

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seem to want to be identified as, figures. This flirtation with figuration, particularly biomorphic figuration, is seen at its clearest in *Bacchanale* of 1946.

Although drawn line helped to introduce interior shapes to Hofmann's pictures, an effect he thereafter used consistently even when those shapes were large amorphous areas, one feels a puckish playfulness in his drawing that may be taken as typical of the openness and receptiveness with which he approached his task. In several pictures—*Circus* (1945), *The Fish and the Bird* (1945), and *Le Gilotin* (1953), for instance—one suspects that Hofmann followed the Leonardesque formula of applying large areas of paint and then standing back to see what shapes those areas suggested to him, bringing out the resulting animal or human forms with drawn lines of a childish or caricatural character. The procedure was, of course, one favored by Surrealism, and Hofmann's light-hearted use of it—if, indeed, he did use it—may suggest his relationship to that movement. It also suggests what seems to have been his attraction to the work of Joan Miro, most noticeable in such works as *Immolation* (1946) and, later, *Autumn Flurry* (1954), which almost seems to be signed "Miro" at the right center. During this same period Hofmann's color tended to become more saturated and less modulated and to gather in discrete areas, giving it greater force. More subtly, it was increasingly used to activate other colors by juxtaposition or to bring to life neutral grounds, as in the bright hues laid over the otherwise dull gray of *Circus*.

In the pictures of the mid-1940's one first begins to sense the pictorial "push-pull" of which so much has since been made. In *Nostalgia* (1944), for example, large areas of black are juxtaposed with large areas of white. Because of the nature of these hues themselves and because of the way Hofmann used them, the tendency would normally be to identify the black with the surface of the picture and to read the white areas as openings into depth. Hofmann denies this reading, however, by placing parts of the white on top of an assertive red which holds it to the surface of the canvas, creating a layered back-and-forth effect in a depth so shallow as not to be depth at all but a plane identical with the lateral extent of the canvas. This constitutes, of course, a sophisticated coloristic transformation of Cubist structure. Hofmann relies on differences in hue, value, and paint texture to keep these intricate structures from becoming congested.

If the 1940's were years of increasing daring and breadth in Hofmann's art, during which he moved toward freer use of all the painterly means at his command and toward greater size and scale, the early 1950's were the years in which those developments were consolidated. During this time one is particularly aware of large areas of blue in his canvasses, a color which tends to be yielding in nature but which Hofmann used at high saturation to keep it from suggesting atmosphere. This gave him a coloristic armature, neither as neutral as gray nor as lively as another hue, around which to build his explorations of color, and he acknowledged its presence in his titles (*Blue Glory*, 1950; *Blue Enchantment*, 1951; *Fantasia in Blue*, 1954). Not infrequently, blue served as a ground against which

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shapes of other colors, particularly red and green, were placed. Later, this figure-ground relationship was to be subsumed into a more complex and less easily definable pictorial structure. *Blue Glory* exemplifies the increasing variety of Hofmann's textures, its coruscated surface ranging from areas of thick impasto to those of almost total physical flatness, while *Blue Enchantment* evidences the appearance of defined geometrical shapes, carefully interlocked and interpenetrating so as to suppress suggestions of atmosphere. Characteristic of all Hofmann's work but particularly noticeable in the pictures of this period, which tend to have discrete shapes placed against plain grounds rather than being as "all-over" as earlier and later compositions, are the framing brushstrokes at the extreme edges of the picture and parallel to those edges. It is as if Hofmann wanted to define absolutely the arena within which he was acting and to delimit and control the painterly object he was creating. In this way, not only would there be no suggestions of atmosphere but none of infinite extent, and the power of the works could be entirely concentrated in their increasing internal scale and complexity.

By 1955 Hofmann was totally in command of his transformed art, as is indicated by the superb *Undulating Expanse*. Here, colors are applied at high value in discrete areas, shapes are clearly defined and carefully balanced with color so as not to appear behind or in front of one another, and the brushwork generally gives the impression of thin and open application. The relatively few areas of thick impasto seem remnants of previous explorations and are by no means the strongest parts of the composition, although they do nothing to disrupt it. One senses here the shift in pictorial burden from the physical texture of the paint to its hue—from tactility to the visual—and what textural variety remains tends to be expressed not in terms of paint thickness but in terms of variety of application. Pictures with Soutine-like surfaces, such as *Durbilant Equilibrium* (1954), are by no means the strongest of this period, and a series of washy color studies from 1955 can stand for the transformation in Hofmann's art, showing how he was able to keep compositional tautness and coloristic intensity while opening his pictures out away from pictorial clutter. From then until the end of his life a decade later, Hofmann proceeded from triumph to triumph. It should be noted that during this decade Hofmann remained perfectly capable of making successful pictures using any of the pictorial means of his past, and one of the most striking things about his development is how much it resists periodicity—how he did everything at every moment of his mature career. Witness *The Garden* of 1956, a picture in which, just at the moment he had expanded the scale both of his overall compositions and of the elements that composed them, the composition is built up of small and regularly brushed applications of pigment.

Among the evidences of Hofmann's coloristic mastery, that mastery which seems to defy analysis and is so hard to verbalize, are his ability to combine in the same composition flat areas of bright saturated hue and smaller applications of mixed and "beautiful" color, and his uncanny

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power to make brown speak. In the hands of masters such as Chardin and Ingres, soft grayed browns were juxtaposed with other muted colors to become part of a melting coloristic fabric in total harmony. Hofmann, however, chooses not only the browns least attractive in themselves, chocolaty and muddy, but juxtaposes them—one wants to say affronts them—with other hues of a character and vitality not calculated to ameliorate or harmonize them. *Autumn Flurry* (1954) builds up a visual brown out of green, yellow, and red, *Early Dawn* (1957) juxtaposes brown with other colors that would normally kill it, and the powerful *In Sober Ecstasy* (1965) places a rich brown square and an equally rich crimson one on top of a ground that also includes brown among its myriad hues.

In Hofmann's later works every variation is played on the pictorial devices of which he had made himself master. Some compositions are constructed of brushed-on applications of paint the edges of which soften to melt into other such applications. Others are composed entirely of carefully defined rectangles. Still others combine these two means, superimposing rectangles on less clearly defined grounds. Paint is dripped, spattered, brushed, and apparently poured, used both matte and glossy, and Duco is juxtaposed with oil to vary surface reflectance. One becomes more aware than ever that there is no typical Hofmann—or rather that everything is typical in this passionate and prodigious *oeuvre*. In general, close-valued pictures or those the facture of which is indistinct come off less well than others, and the clearer the articulation the better. At times, Hofmann uses large areas of glossy black Duco, only to suppress their assertiveness by spatters of brilliant high-valued green, by "marbleized" passages, etc., as in the powerful *And Thunderclouds Pass* (1961). At other times, he deals solely in saturated reds, oranges, and yellows, to create compositions such as *Golden Wall* (1961) that glow from the intensity of their juxtaposed hues. Seeing these late pictures, it becomes apparent that Hofmann, an artist trained in Europe and working solely there until he was fifty, was able to make himself into one of the greatest of American painters. If his initial colorism and interest in building up pictorial composition from a multitude of carefully controlled elements descended from the European tradition, the lengths to which he pushed the brilliance of his color and the ever increasing expansiveness of scale on which he worked show clearly how thoroughly he assimilated the American tradition. Without in any way abandoning his initial heritage, he was able to absorb another set of conventions altogether to create a body of work unique in the middle of this century. Perhaps in part because of this his work has looked too conventional—too "beautiful"—to American eyes and too daring—too undisciplined—to European eyes to be easily accepted by either. Luckily, time will remedy that situation as the inherent strength and sheer beauty of Hofmann's work carve out for it the place it so richly deserves among the finest painting of its time.

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VERNON YOUNG

Much Madness: Werner Herzog and Contemporary German Cinema

Much Madness is divinest Sense—
To a discerning Eye—
Much Sense—the starkest Madness

EMILY DICKINSON SHOULD BE INSTALLED as Muse of the New German Cinema! . . . In the mid-twenties, the Caligari atmosphere of German films was attributed to the postwar situation of military defeat and catastrophic inflation. Ten years later, a similar climate of aberration was held to be a direct expression of the Nazi ethos. What, then, accounts for the continuing presence of dementia and the anarchist response in German films made during the last fifteen years? Democracy and a prosperous Republic? The establishment of *Social* Democracy? Something in the German soul, a rank sediment of Romanticism, finds no sense in the order of things, whatever the economic and political dispensation. Like Jainism, the underlying doctrine is simple to a fault: evil cannot be successfully challenged; society should be renounced. Yet, can we accept, without question, a handful of film makers as representing their culture by consent? While I should like to answer no, I have a strong feeling that they *are* surrogates for the subconscious drift of the society they have been enfranchised to defame or reject. Alexander Kluge, Rainer Fassbinder, Hans Juergen Syberberg, Jean-Marie Straub, Reinhard Hauff and Werner Herzog comprise a reaction which, although the several talents involved are widely unequal in competence, has a recognizable unity. Syberberg and Straub are evidently so disdainful of or alienated from the world in which they live that they consistently escape into laborious and radically *un-cinematic* biographies, or adaptations of literature and opera: the mad Ludwig of Bavaria; the fantasy career of Charles May; static versions of Racine, Schoenberg and, naturally, Brecht, who has torpedoed two generations of German writing. Kluge and Fassbinder are inept and diffuse; injustice-hunters feebly grasping at social provocations to compensate for their creative deficiency. Werner Herzog is of course the most gifted new talent in Germany, beside Reinhard Hauff,[1] and it is depressing to recall that outside Germany the German film renaissance was announced by our *lumpen*-intelligentsia, the critics, *before* they had seen *any* film by Herzog *or* Hauff! After *Aguirre, Wrath of God* had run for fifteen months in Paris, the

[1] Seen too late for lengthy inclusion above, Reinhard Hauff's *The Brutalization of Franz Blum* (1974), a prison-as-society film, was made with virile assurance, free from the vagaries of the foggy directors listed here.

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press elsewhere repeated its notorious dependence on French authority by deciding to take Herzog seriously: over-seriously, to atone for its neglect.

To preserve one's finest illusions about Herzog, one should see *Aguirre* after all his other films—or perhaps see no other! It is the single unwavering movie continuity he has achieved: inexorable in its progress, taciturn and deadly, hauntingly beautiful (Thomas Mauch on camera).[2] To the gorgeous and uncanny music of Popul Vuh, the velvet-and-bucklered desperadoes—a splinter group from Pissaro's expedition—descend from the Andes to their damnation, perishing on the Amazon by pestilence, envenomed arrows and the crooked hand of Aguirre. Herzog, impatient of false modesty, has summarized his own daring and his justifiable pride in this movie.

> I think its attraction—the advantage it has over Hollywood—is that it is real. The spectacle is real; the danger is real. It is the real life of the jungle, not the botanic gardens of the studio . . . . It is easy enough to make a film in your own living room; but imagine trying to make one with 500 people in the Amazon tributaries. We had a budget of a little over $300,000; but to look at, *Aguirre* is a 3-million dollar film.
>
> (Quoted from BBC Radio Times, December 3, 1976)

Unreservedly I agree with him (and accept realism as a criterion in this context). *Aguirre* is among the outstanding film narratives, ever. And perhaps one of the reasons for its purity of direction, its decisive storytelling, is the limitation, of geography and budget, to which Herzog was obliged to submit. He could scarcely return to Andean heights to reshoot footage when halfway down. He had to shoot *chronologically* (do you realize how exceptional this is?) and frame exactly what he required in each episode: no spare footage from which to edit and no allowance—bless his stars—for "philosophic" detours taken en route. Incidentally the Popul Vuh theme was used again, with enthralling effect, in his 40-minute ski-jump film, *Woodcarver Steiner's Strange Ecstasy* (1975), photographed by Jörg Schmidt-Reitwein. Poetically unmatched in the legion of skiing films we've seen year after year are the following shots, *from below,* in slow motion, as Steiner soars unhindered through dazzling snowlight.

And who would say which is Herzog's hero—the skier, immaculate and alone under heaven, or Aguirre on his raft, covered with monkeys, possessing the wilderness of his hallucination? Recently, speaking before an audience of film-school students, Herzog reminded me of Dr. Johnson's judgment on Rousseau. "A man who talks nonsense so well must know that he is talking nonsense." Herzog cheerfully referred to his less-than-favorable critics as *cretins,* scorned the Hollywood Academy for not having given to the retarded delinquent whom he picked up for *Caspar Hauser* their annual acting award, boasted that he had made his first film with a camera he had stolen from a film school because, since it was unused, he had a *right* to it, and advised the students present to go and do likewise—

[2] Cf. my review of *Aguirre* and other German film makers in THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4 (Winter 1975–76), p. 574.

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the barbarian view in extremis: I have the right to plunder whatever property is not being utilized by someone else. But for the grace of his vocation, Herzog might well have become a criminal—a personable one, about whom admiring young Germans would have made movies.

The earliest film made by Herzog I have seen is *The Fantastic Defence of German Cross Fortress* (1966), 13 minutes long; a somewhat heavyhanded travesty of the paranoid German's necessity for *defending* himself: German youths on a weekend, playing War in an abandoned fort. Slow-motion shots and an off-track barrage gave the short film a certain sinister taste, but Germans no doubt find it closer to their anxieties than we do. Herzog's first full-length work, *Signs of Life* (1967), had the normal uncertainties of early effort, made with what must have been restricted financing: not enough footage from which to edit flexibly, actors unevenly matched and individually precarious; the subject: boredom and strain among three German soldiers recuperating in a garrison on the island of Cos (Greek Occupation). From no rooted cause of which we are ever apprised, the man Stroszek moves through irritation to violence and insanity, finally occupying the ammunition depot in a fort, where he threatens to blow up the town. As soldiers are deputized to scale the walls and surprise him while he childishly sets off fireworks, the film ends without our learning the outcome. Nothing in the script dictates the terminal ambiguity; the three soldiers and the Greek wife of Stroszek are not adequatedly related, one to the other; no inference is encouraged that a state of war has anything to do with Stroszek's blow-off; a gypsy wanders in and out of the story, claiming he's a king looking for his people, to no point I could discover or invent. With hindsight, one can see that Herzog was in any case discovering his principal subject (or, better, that it was discovering *him*, by reason of some private obsession unknown to us): insanity. (His 1977 film, entitled *Stroszek*, features "Bruno S." and another gentle loony seen in *Caspar Hauser* and *The Glass Heart*.) Conspicuous in *Signs of Life* was Herzog's feeling for spirit of place. White, crumbling, ancient and sad, the Greek island suffers wind and sun; the sea tumbles in, cats belong to nobody; a donkey killed by Stroszek lies belly-swollen for hours until dragged off by a truck, leaving a long impasto of dried blood.

Fata Morgana (78 minutes), shot under hellish circumstances between 1968 and 1970, is for two-thirds of its stay an uncommonly beautiful film essay, fatally impaired thereafter by bad judgment which tried to edit expressive beauty and decay into a parable of Paradise become Hell-on-earth. Schmidt-Reitwein's camera roams the Saharan waste, self-sufficient and eloquent, with no need of the on-track talk that troubles it: sand dunes heave and ripple under the wind like whales surfacing; lakes appear (formed by mirage), salt beds, ghostly reflections of distant oases; enter, the dreck of man—miles of barbed wire, carcasses of abandoned trucks and demolished airplanes; black children in mud villages, like packs of lost animals, staring dumbly at the camera (these shots held too long), and a final excruciating contrast, intermittent but never ending, filmed in a tent serving as nightclub, where two freaks with piano, drum and cymbals "entertain" an audience we never see, the sequence repeated

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and repeated, face-front, *ad nauseam,* in the "alienating" fashion of Jean-Luc Godard.

From this treatment, sadistically designed, to the vileness of *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1970), which Herzog himself has confessed is a "sick" movie, it's only a step. The production followed a murderous period of misadventure in the Cameroons where, imprisoned by the authorities, Herzog overheard other prisoners being tortured to death (I quote him) and contracted *bilharzia,* a fiendish blood-fluke disease. For these reasons, and probably other, *Even Dwarfs* is a beastly film inspired by an even more saturnine view of mankind than *Viridiana,* while wanting the art of Bunuel's attack. Herzog adds little to the store of images already contributed by Bunuel. His institution—full of dwarfs (Latin American setting) rises in revolt, hurling abuse and rocks at the office windows of the barricaded supervisor (himself a dwarf). They kill a sow, throw food at each other, toss crockery at a driverless car which circles and recircles a patio (repeated too often, each take held interminably), kill a blind fellow-dwarf, burn down palm trees, stage a procession bearing a crucified monkey and push the car into a crater. (I think the supervisor killed his hostage and fled witless into the desert, but this climax was not clear to me.) Long before the end I was silently screaming, *Ich bin im bild!*

Herzog now levelled off to produce a documentary on the Blind and his masterpiece, *Aguirre.* At this stage it is safe to venture that, as Herzog construes him, Man, led by indeterminate causes, is a maniac or the victim of maniacs, for whom all constructed reality is less adequate than his dreams. *Caspar Hauser* (1974) and *The Glass Heart* confirm such a definition with appreciably less conviction than *Aguirre.* But 'tis odds beyond arithmetic: nothing will deter my fellow-critics from again doing the Gadarene act as they did with Bunuel, Godard and Bergman, accepting all longueurs of the later Herzog for fear of assuming a rearguard position in the new stampede to proclaim his millennarian insight. They just dote on film directors who serve as double agents—one hand holding a bomb, the other reaching for an Oscar.

Caspar Hauser illustrates the blurring of art and life to which Herzog, if not consistently committed, is prone. We all know the source of the Hauser story: the mysterious youth, imprisoned from childhood to conceal his illegitimacy, who suddenly appeared, senseless and mute, on the streets of Ansbach a century and a half ago. The affair is a ghastly enough instance of man's perverse inhumanity to make its own point, a freak crime with political undertones. Anyone who reads the case, or the novel by Jacob Wasserman, is free to extrapolate, if he *must,* so that Caspar becomes, in Kafkaesque terms, a symbol of Man's fate! Not in my darkest hours can I accept the predication that Man is a throwout who grew up in a cellar, like a potato, and was thrust abruptly into the world at the age of majority, halt and speechless, made to learn things *he didn't want to learn*—such as language, table manners and the compositions of Mozart! But this, in effect, is what Herzog's film declares, attempting further to make Hauser a victim of the bourgeoisie (who in point of fact were kind to him) and of High Society, allegedly represented by that faggot Englishman and his sycophants. Beside Herzog's apparent ignorance of how half the world behaves, his specious definition was nourished by his identifying the

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legendary Hauser, a maltreated bastard aristocrat, with a present-day "Bruno S.," unwanted child of a Berlin prostitute, confined to a mental institution where, by way of a documentary movie which included shots of the hapless boy, Herzog discovered him. Herzog never heeds Henry James's warning that in art the "real thing" is usually less negotiable than an impersonation. Hauser as "played" by "Bruno S." was a fairly repulsive monster with whom it was pretty difficult to identify oneself—save by extended reference to antihuman outrage at large; he lacked the kind of strange beauty and alienation a professional actor would have conveyed, and strange beauty was, I contend, demanded, if pathos and anger were the emotions to be aroused.

Getting Caspar on his feet (literally) involved a disproportionate amount of time; too little was spent on developing, step by step, the ordeals of acquiring consciousness and articulation which should be, after all, the *essential* matters—the more so since Caspar's painful progress toward becoming human is cruelly cancelled by his assassination. Scarcely a man at this point, his death is not tragic; it is more comparable to the crushing of a beetle. Inter alia I was unimpressed by the kernels of rustic wisdom with which Caspar refuted his teachers: boy Jesus confronting the elders. And what did those iridescent visions connote, of multitudes ascending a mountain and gathering in a desert? Herzog in arch person said we should interpret them for ourselves. I'm more than fed up with being told by mentally vague filmmakers that I should run away and make my own movie from their remnants. Beguiled by the wonderful landscape views and the emotional support of Baroque music, most lookers-on, I gather, ignored vexatious questions, accepted Caspar as a model for their own self-pity and settled for beauty (of place, *not* of person!), and I will never deny that there are great catching moments in this film when the rolling acres of Bavaria (as I have seen then under a dawn light that turns shadows a soft purple) suggest those of a Nature just born, yet greenly prepared to accommodate unhappy Man.

Subject and style of *The Glass Heart* (1976) are informed by the same contradiction: every prospect pleases, only man is vile. In Herzog's third feature film, man was nasty, brutish and short. In his eighth, man is nasty, brutish and cataleptic. The scenic art overwhelms, the allegory (from a novel by Herbert Achternbusch, centered on local legend) is *kitsch*. A Bavarian village, early nineteenth century, provides nominal setting; since Herzog wanted to project time-and-space extensions, he intercut (and in some frames, I believe, *interfused*) seraphic shots taken in Alaska and western Ireland! Jörg Schmidt-Reitwein has reached a level of perfection I thought exclusively preempted by the Hungarian Sandor Sara. Never have I seen moss that looked mossier, or grey stone that showed such pastel hues, or definable space of water and sky that appeared at once so illimitable. Forms are not simply *bathed* in light, they have light and air *around* them. His interiors are breath-taking, especially those imitations of Georges de La Tour in which figures inhabit a profound darkness, their faces or hands alone illuminated, artificially, by candle flames. Herzog put his actors under hypnosis for these sequences (the same naive confusion of means and ends as his casting of "Bruno S.")

Altogether, you have a lot to take in your stride if you stand prepared to

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share the director's disdain for sequential behavior and discernible continuity. Prophesying with accents terrible of dire combustion and confused events, new-hatched to the woeful time, a herdsman with occult powers moons around on mountains and in tavern—a seer derided. Sunk in a trance of their own, the folk, employed in a glass-blowing works, jeer at Hias (the herdsman) and spend their free hours in drunken sloth, interrupted by lethal brawls. (Sometimes, watching this movie, you're staggering through a Bosch!) When the morose young *patron* (who, I must say, looked as if *permanently* under hypnosis) runs berserk, setting fire to the workshops; the villagers, hunting a scapegoat, throw the prophet into prison. (This is no end bewildering; the *patron* is shown in the same cell and in the next shot Hias the herder is wandering free, outdoors. Faith opens locks, I deduce.) As a fable of man's fate under monopoly enterprise (one probable interpretation you can flog yourself with), *The Glass Heart* is tissue-thin. A demented factory-owner, obsessed by finding a formula for ruby glass, who murders his fifteen-year-old scullery girl (she has ruby-red blood) and sets fire to his own fortune is a patently silly symbol of Capitalism Today. However, at the *simple*-story level, the film doesn't function; it's a looseleaf assembly of wondrous images, unclear hints and highlighted boors.

No film director can do everything. Herzog, genius of the visual, cannot structure an argument, cannot characterize in depth; his emotions are imprecise, his sense of reality discontinuous; hence he rarely leaves one with the conviction that anything human is worth preserving. As he has confessed with some candor, he is forever searching for a landscape "unembarrassed by men" . . . How that takes me back—to the German Twenties and a film undiscovered by most film historians, *The Strange Case of Captain Ramper,* wherein an Arctic explorer (Paul Wegener) marooned for years on polar ice, but surviving with the instincts, and pretty much the appearance, of a walrus, is rescued by an expedition and taken back to the world of men where he is exhibited profitably in a cage. Restored to human sense and motion by—A Woman (could you have guessed?), he is reintroduced to Civilized Society (the Weimar Republic in triple exposure). After one good look at this UFA nightmare, Ramper disappears like a shot; in the last closeup he is eagerly deep-breathing the Arctic air from the prow of a returning boat.

Herzog professes to believe that he and the other German newcomers have no common myth. *Have they not?* Considered collectively, Syberberg, Fassbinder, Hauff and Herzog have not come far from the world of Paul Wegener, Conrad Veidt and Emil Jannings. Once you maintain, and mean it, that "Denmark is a prison," and refuse to distinguish among kinds of madness, you have summoned Fortinbras. Or Hitler. And failing Hitler, the Baader-Meinhof League . . . On a character in his novel, *A Small Town in Germany,* John Le Carré bestowed a germane observation: "The young have discovered the cruellest of all truths: that the most effective way of punishing their parents is to imitate them."

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Dreaming a World

DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS AMERICAN BALLET companies have been exchanging the contemporary repertory for nineteenth-century story ballets at an alarming rate. This phenomenon is all the more curious when you consider the anti-academic tendency of American dance during most of its history. After fifty years of experiment, independent work and opening up of new perspectives for movement and theatrical production, it seems our ballet companies have begun to envision themselves as a new dance Establishment, modeled after the worn-out, stagnant system they evaded in the first place.

From Boston to Salt Lake City, from Pittsburgh to Houston, our provincial ballet companies are compulsively staging *Sleeping Beauty, Giselle, Coppélia*, and pacifying the modernists with a sprinkling of novelties by provincial young choreographers. Most of these productions are heavily dependent on visiting guest stars, another European institution to which we've become addicted. American Ballet Theater, which sets the fashion for the others, marked time in New York for twelve weeks during the 1976–77 season, doing six nineteenth century classics and only about fifteen short works, many of them drawn from the pre-1930 European repertory.

What explains this curious reversion to a dance form that belongs neither to our time nor to our culture? Ballet companies are locked into the big-funding/big-audience syndrome, and the story ballets attract patrons. I suppose their appeal comes partly from the fact that they are legible; they do have plots, and new ballet-goers, weaned on musical comedy, don't find them threatening or obscure. These works are also very effective symbols of achievement in a parvenue society—they cost a lot of money to prepare, they look big and glamorous with their elaborate costumes and their imported dancer-personalities. A testament to civic pride and philanthropy.

But all this, in a way, bypasses the real sense and purpose of these ballets. If they originally glorified wealth and power, they did it by imitation. They were materially and philosophically a product of the old monarchies, not, as they are now, a gesture toward vanished dynasties of solidity and taste. Those lush third-act wedding and party scenes were meant to display not only the riches and beauty of the courts, but the best dancing proficiency and invention a carefully guarded ballet tradition could produce. The plots, the magic had an underlying morality that came from a naive confidence that the sides of life's battles were clearly drawn between good and evil, and that what was good or what was proper—usually synonymous—would always win. These ballets are not adventure stories, not romances or diversions, but lessons in civilized

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behavior. If you acted right—followed the rules of loyalty and good form—you could bring the irrational into order; if you did not, you lost everything.

I think one reason these artificial worlds worked is the uniformity of the societies that produced and witnessed them. The classical ballet technique was only one element in a mutually understood system of conduct. No one would have asked, as did a ballet patron this spring in Cleveland, "When should we applaud?" If they didn't know, they simply copied the occupants of the King's box.

American Ballet Theater's permanently chaotic state of existence seems almost inimical to the nineteenth century fairy tales, yet they now constitute ABT's most prestigious stock in trade. The spring season at the Metropolitan Opera House was a havoc of poor lighting, bungled cues, recalcitrant machinery, and confusion in the orchestra pit. Far from being a serene custodian of traditional good form, Ballet Theater is an aggregation of strangers who come together—only occasionally with sufficient preparation—and try to meld their separate understandings of a given ballet into one consecutive stage event.

Gelsey Kirkland's debut in *Swan Lake* exposed the company's lack of unity and supportiveness in a way that was sometimes embarrassing, sometimes painful. Kirkland is now in her mid-twenties, the beginning of the period when a ballerina with her fine training and equipment should be conquering artistic worlds. She seems to have recovered her confidence and her stamina after more than a year of decline. Yet, watching her is a nerve-racking experience. Her line at this point is achieved, I feel, by willpower rather than an inner security, and when her nerve fails, the illusion of mastery is shattered. Her fans now supply elaborate psychological explanations of her shaky balances, her careful phrasing, her incipient mannerisms, but the fact remains that Kirkland, when she joined ABT three years ago, was a dancer of exceptionally secure and musical technique.

Her *Swan Lake* showed that she still has a gift for conceiving a role in both dramatic and movement terms. The two sides of the dual role, the enchanted swan Odette and the evil Odile, seem more similar in Kirkland's interpretation than they usually are—Odette has moments of passion and temperament, and Odile hints at a potential for yielding beneath her cruel exterior. This makes a lot of sense to me—it helps me to believe that the Prince could fall in love with one woman thinking she's the other. But there were only glimpses of this. Ivan Nagy, her partner, was devoted, handsome and sturdy as always, but didn't play to her ideas, her inspirations of the movement. This feeling of spontaneity and dramatic accord was the most singular of many singlular aspects of Kirkland's early partnership with Mikhail Baryshnikov. The performances of *Coppélia*, *La Fille Mal Gardée*, *La Sylphide* and *Giselle* that they did together in their first year were an indication that the classics were a live dramatic challenge as well as a dancing feat. Kirkland with an inflexibly dependable partner can go only so far.

ABT wants to present stars, and, in Kirkland's case, to take credit for

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creating them. But what the company contributed to this major debut, other than a mild publicity buildup, seemed to be Lucia Chase as the Queen Mother looking on benevolently from the throne as Kirkland went through her tricks. But she needed more than her boss's encouragement to ward off the terrifying mishaps of ABT production. Lights went off in the middle of a variation. A wobbly violin seemed to be trying to throw her off pointe. And in the complete disaster of a finale, Rothbart's castle—instead of sinking into the lake when his evil power was broken—was seen to bounce a few times as it toppled, causing god knows what wreckage backstage and cancelling the final vision of the Swan Queen and the Prince, united in death, sailing off into the beyond.

ABT's musical negligence is a scandal all by itself. Principal conductor Akira Endo alternates between spinelessly following every ballerina's eccentric ideas about tempo and taking a normally leaden beat that drifts unpredictably or disappears for periods of time when the orchestra can't get together. In one performance of a well-known Stravinsky score this spring, some of the solo instruments were just not there. For the season's *Giselles*, John Lanchbery was imported to conduct, and he succeeded not only in maintaining a performance with some drive, but in getting a symphonic sound out of the group. However, he arrived in New York in time for only one runthrough, on the afternoon of the first *Giselle*, which was also televised nationally on "Live from Lincoln Center." The runthrough was a walkthrough, and in the evening the corps lagged behind his beat, which was considerably faster than the sludge through which they're used to dancing.

The most curious and disappointing thing about the Kirkland *Swan Lake* was the changes she made in the third-act choreography. *Swan Lake* may be old, but most companies that still claim to be doing the Petipa-Ivanov version are generally agreed about what the key variations are supposed to look like. I have no idea where Kirkland got the steps she did, or why she was allowed to do them instead of the proper choreography, which certainly ought to be within her range. The only directing credit is given to David Blair, who died a year ago, and I wonder when he had looked at his 1967 production prior to that. If anyone does look at ABT productions, besides the audience, no one thinks it odd that Nagy sits with a cloth over his legs during the third-act divertissements to keep his muscles from getting cold; or that two principal characters of the first act, the Prince's friend Benno and the tutor, don't make an appearance at his birthday party; or that the peasant's maypole dance in Act I has been simplified so that the ribbons no longer get woven together. So perhaps Kirkland's choreographic aberrations are just another incongruity that the company overlooks.

Implicit in Ballet Theater's policy of doing the classics is the idea that they are preserving something, a kind of living museum. But it is a museum with interchangeable parts. I especially like the highland dance in the first act of *La Sylphide* because the children actually dance in the grown-ups' dance instead of having a simplified, special one of their own. This is typical of the world of settled domesticity cherished by the cho-

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reographer, August Bournonville, a world that James violates when he runs after the Sylphide. The night I saw the ballet, only three children appeared, and instead of dancing, they watched the adults from the sidelines. At other performances I'm told, they danced as usual.

It was museum accuracy that the company stressed in declaring its intention to revive the 1910/'26/'54 Fokine/Gontcharova/Royal Ballet production of *Firebird*. Here the company's lack of integration was particularly but subtly evident. The production was carefully staged by Christopher Newton from notation and probably also the 1959 film of the Royal's production with Margot Fonteyn and Michael Somes. The steps seem right, the costumes and scenery seem right, and yet the production lacks energy and coherence. Part of this deficiency came from the music. Played by a diminished orchestra at Endo's lethargic tempos, it didn't provide the glue needed to hold together all the ballet's impeccably matched parts.

Firebird, like its successor *Petrouchka*, is not a single fairy tale but a conglomeration of themes from Russian folklore, and maybe the elements never quite went together in the first place. Purely in a dance sense, there's the Russian character ballet of the Firebird and the monsters; the folk-style dancing of the princesses, done in soft shoes; there's the impossibly brief wedding scene in which no one dances at all, they only walk; and the pas de deux between the Prince and the Firebird, in which the dancers, working with all the same conventions as a classical pas de deux, must convince the audience that they aren't in love, that something entirely different is taking place from what occurs in the Prince-and-the-bird duet of Swan Lake Act II.

Everytime I look at the monster scene in the Royal Ballet's *Firebird* film, I'm frustrated because the cut-happy cameramen keep zipping around the stage, never showing what all the monsters are doing at any time. I longed for ABT to show me what this famous scene looked like, but they seem to have used almost the same technique. Squad after squad of slaves, exotics and lackeys of the magician Kostchei advance and subside in perfect unison and straight lines, while the others mark time. Only at the very end of Stravinsky's orgiastic music do they all get in motion together—hypnotized apparently by the Firebird.

I still can't decide if the mechanical look of the scene was what Fokine intended, or if it became over-regimented in the hands of the orderly British, or if we were just seeing the downtrodden Ballet Theater corps exhibiting its usual resignation. Whatever the case, this scene is too organized and expressionless to say what it's supposed to say to our more naturalistically accustomed eyes. How could these docile, Sunday-school processions be the source of Kostchei's diabolical power? The ABT dancers can't seem to muster up any conviction in the movement they're doing; what they tell us is that they find it boring and unrewarding in spite of the nice costumes they get to wear.

Maybe after all it's the matter of belief that has to permeate these ballets, and maybe the reason they've been so superficially done is that we don't believe in magic—neither the dancers nor the audience. The old ballet world was built on the idea of transformation—ballerinas were painted tiptoeing across the petals of flowers because the audience wanted

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to see them that way. An elegant turn or a soaring leap expressed the dancer's faith not only in his own sweat but in the royal or supernatural possibility of excellence. These ballets are saying over and over that there is such a thing as perfection—and such a thing as total evil—and that there are forces loose in the world that we can never understand.

Baryshnikov's *Nutcracker* possessed a faith in magic, and that was what satisfied me most about the ballet. His first act is missing the homespun warmth of the Balanchine version, while the second is less brilliant in the choreographic department, but what he was trying for in reconceiving the ballet seemed to be a psychological clarity. Baryshnikov's story centers around Clara as a pre-adolescent girl whose fantasies give a form to her nebulous feelings about growing up. The toy nutcracker that she loves turns into a real man, not a little boy prince charming; and the kingdom he takes her to is not the candy heaven of a greedy child but a court of well-bred grownups over which the Prince invites her to help him rule. The magician-father figure Drosselmeyer battles with the Prince for Clara in the final scene, and when she wakes up from her dream, both of them have disappeared. I found the end a little bleak, but Baryshnikov's idea of a girl poised between childhood and adolescence is interesting. Clara loves these make-believe projections, these good dreams. They're strange but comforting. They don't make real-life demands.

Drosselmeyer is seen first showing his puppets to the audience in a before-the-curtain prologue. At the Christmas party he is elusive, somewhat sinister, somewhat benevolent, a personage who doesn't quite belong, who slips out of the room when the party is in progress and just as mysteriously turns up after everyone is supposed to have gone home. A force in Clara's life whose nature and plans for her she doesn't understand, is just beginning to be aware of. After presenting her with the Nutcracker Prince, Drosselmeyer sends her off on her own with him.

The two run in wonderful accelerating, leaping circles through the land of snowflakes, the Prince leading her to an unknown world. But the kingdom he takes her to isn't half as lively as her own family's living room. Perhaps the decorous, courtly behavior and classical dancing in the scene is Baryshnikov's metaphor for a formal, exacting grown-up world, one that is more serious than Clara had anticipated. She views the court dances and divertissements as a guest, not as the Prince's fiancée, remaining in her nightdress throughout the scene, though if she really wanted to join them, she could easily dream herself into a tutu. As soon as the romantic pas de deux begins, Drosselmeyer reappears, and the dance becomes a pas de trois, with both men struggling for Clara's allegiance. And when she finds herself alone at home, perhaps she's given herself a temporary reprieve.

As the ballet was staged, it lacked a sense of community. The ABT dancers substitute generalities ("party" or "court ball") for the specific behavior that tells you exactly how a group of people has come together and what intimacies they share. In the receiving line at the end of the party, Clara's father seems to be greeting the guests instead of bidding them goodnight. Things like that. But also the cavernous Metropolitan space seemed to spread everything out, it made their dancing have to

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shout even when it could have been conversational. This *Nutcracker* had the emptily grand look of a Hollywood movie set that seems made for something much more stupendous than anything that ever happens in it.

But Baryshnikov carried out most of the character illusions with splendid conviction. When Clara falls asleep and dreams of mice fighting toy soldiers, the repulsive mice all wear the clothes of the male guests at her parents' party, and the Mouse King is the very same guest who drank too much and broke the toy nutcracker. The soldiers are led by a life-size Nutcracker, who chops at the mice with his sword and springs up in the air stiff-legged with both feet flexed. Baryshnikov danced this scene with a fondness for the grotesque that underlies comic genius. After the soldiers beat the mice, Drosselmeyer slips off the Nutcraker's mask and soldier suit, revealing a prince, the embodiment of anybody's girlish dreams. As Baryshnikov just stood there dressed in white and gleaming, all *my* life's fairy tales came back to me and I thought "Of course!"

Notes on Contributors

Recently named an Advisory Editor of this Review, FREDERICK BROWN is a Professor of French at the State University of New York in Stony Brook and author of two books, *An Impersonating of Angels: A Biography of Jean Cocteau* and *Pere-Lachaise: Elysium as Real Estate.*

PETER MAKUCK* has returned from a Fulbright year in France, where he lived and lectured in the Savoie, and is now teaching at East Carolina University.

RUTH FAINLIGHT's new book of poems, *Sibyls*, with illustrations by Leonard Baskin, will be published by the Gehenna Press.

ROBERT PHILLIPS* published his first collection of short stories, *The Land of Lost Content*, in 1970 and is at work on the second. A book of his poetry, *The Pregnant Man*, will be published by Doubleday.

Born in Detroit forty-nine years ago, PAUL PETRIE* is married to the printmaker, Sylvia Spencer Petrie, is the author of four volumes of poetry and is a teacher at the University of Rhode Island.

ROGER SALE, a former Advisory Editor, is the author of the recently published book *Seattle, Past to Present* (University of Washington Press).

IRA SADOFF's* second book of poems, *Palm Reading in Winter*, will be published by Houghton Mifflin. His first collection is entitled *Settling Down.*

W. S. DI PIERO* has published one book of poems, *Country of Survivors*, and is seeking a publisher for the second.

The author of twenty-five books, DAVID R. SLAVITT has most recently published *Vital Signs*, a volume of poetry.

(Continued on page 436)

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle

I AM PLEASED TO REPORT that Joan Peyser's biographical study of Pierre Boulez, the Frenchman who stepped down this year after six seasons as music director of the New York Philharmonic, is addressed to the general reader.[1] Though Mrs. Peyser deals with Boulez's compositions in some detail, she eschews musical jargon and those blow-by-blow descriptions that can make works of exegesis rough sledding for the musically innocent. This is the first extensive treatment of Boulez in English (two compilations of his own writing, *Notes of an Apprenticeship* and *Boulez on Music Today*, and one or two articles in professional journals just about complete the serious bibliographical list in English), and because the European-American musical world—or at least its most visible part—has revolved around him since shortly after World War II, the book, for all its shortcomings, provides a reasonably reliable guide to that world's three decades just past.

Beyond that, regrettably, it is difficult to take one's enthusiasm. I would hesitate to call the book a failure: there is a great deal of material here, some just marginal and some plain worthless, true, but some of it to the point and fascinating and some marginal yet fascinating. But as a whole it founders on both its method and its execution.

We are in trouble at the outset: Mrs. Peyser begins by telling us not about Boulez but about herself, and how she came to write the book. She recounts something of her background, her career as a musical journalist, and her conception of a work about Boulez's New York tenure. But, she tells us, even after agreeing to allow her to "shadow" him after he came to New York in 1971, he balked at admitting her to full orchestra rehearsals, programming conferences, and auditions for new players. Despairing, after a few months, at the paucity of her material, Mrs. Peyser declares that she

> . . . decided to write a different kind of book, one that would have its roots in Erik Erikson's concept of psychobiography. I hoped to explain how this formidable talent and extraordinary intellect grew to be the man and the cultural force he became.

That is a tall order; I doubt anyone could fill it, and Mrs. Peyser doesn't.

Most of the difficulty lies in Mrs. Peyser's apparent working definition of psychobiography (she leaves it to the reader to deduce her procedure). It consists of relating what she knows of Boulez's childhood (ascetic and devoted to the Church) and youth (ascetic and rebellious), and observations—her own and others'—of Boulez's character as manifested in his professional and personal relationships, to the progress of his career from

[1] BOULEZ, by *Joan Peyser*. Schirmer Books/Macmillan Co. $12.95.

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intransigent partisan of total serialism in the late forties and early fifties to genial conductor and public figure of the mid-seventies, still committed to serialism and the avant-garde as he returns to Paris to take charge of a progressive musical research and pedagogic institute (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique) in the Centre Beaubourg. The result is some genuine insight and some well-informed chat and sprightly anecdote in the mold of the Stravinsky-Craft conversation books of the late fifties and sixties.

But Mrs. Peyser goes further: she wants Boulez's compositions to conform to her scheme as well. Therefore, she contends that when Boulez and serialism lost the leadership of the European avant-garde to Stockhausen and "chance" or "aleatory" music around 1958, the psychic blow affected not only his character but the quality of his music.[2] Gradually he funnelled his energies into his conducting career, tempering his intransigence and extending his range backward through large portions of the standard orchestral repertoire, and finally taking "establishment" posts with the BBC Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, and then the New York Philharmonic to enlist the power and prestige of these organizations in winning audiences for serial music. But the cost of this deflection of energies, Mrs. Peyser asserts, was the evisceration of the music he composed after *Le Marteau sans Maître* in 1954. Few who are familiar with the works would support this assessment. It is generally agreed that Boulez's most impressive achievement is the vocal-orchestral work *Pli selon Pli*, composed in various stages in the late fifties and early sixties (and still, perhaps, subject to revision); and *Rituel*, in which the composer led the Philharmonic this past season—a rare breach of the self-imposed ban on his own works from the orchestra's programs—was ranked high in his *oeuvre* by trustworthy observers. It is tenable, of course, that no later work approaches the concentration and intensity of such early pieces as *Le Visage Nuptial* and the First Piano Sonata, and that the "openendedness" of the later works—the refusal to call them complete—bespeaks less a deliberate aesthetic stance than insecurity about their worth. But the broadening of the canvas over the past two decades, together with the increased authority over orchestral timbres, argues strongly otherwise. Mrs. Peyser once more demonstrates the futility of trying to link events in the life of a creator to specific acts of creation.

The book is further weakened by its style. Paragraph is piled upon paragraph with little consecutive feeling; banal word choices and clumsy turns of phrase abound ("Human actions depend on a mixture of motives. . . . Steinecke [organizer and backer of the Darmstadt Festival] was a symbol of a time when unanimity of taste and homogeneity of purpose spared music the scattering influence that bewilders it today."). It is easy to pardon the normal quotient of factual inaccuracy, but not the other

[2] The fact that Stockhausen derived these ideas from John Cage accounts, Mrs. Peyser believes, for Boulez's persistent anti-American bias as music director of the Philharmonic—an assertion contradicted, though not refuted, by the large number of American works, including a Cage commission, on the 1976–77 programs.

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manifestations of sloppy editing. Wilfred Bain, former dean of the University of Indiana School of Music and a prominent figure for several decades, is consistently "Dean Bains"—though his name is spelled correctly in the index. The reader is given "topography" for "typography," "troop" for "troupe," "depreciation" for "deprecation," and so forth; Baden-Baden's Südwestfunk orchestra is accorded its correct German appellation once, in every other instance without the umlaut. And poor Igor Stravinsky is twice the victim of elementary errors: his book *Dialogues and a Diary* is called *Diaries and a Dialogue*, and his composition *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* is rendered *Symphony of Wind Instruments*. But perhaps the book's gravest sin against thought and language lies in the use of the word "thus:" in Mrs. Peyser's hands a sentence starter with little functional relation to what has gone before or is to follow, it pops up several times per page like the pustules of an infectious rash.

Yet to have the career of the remarkable Pierre Boulez spread out before one is inescapably fascinating, and because he is a central and commanding figure Mrs. Peyser, particularly in her final chapters, broaches some issues of the first importance. She believes that Boulez came to New York with a mission: to induce significant portions of the broad audience for orchestral music, and particularly the young, to understand and value contemporary music. If this is so, then—whatever his partial and individual triumphs—he failed. Her wooden prose notwithstanding, Mrs. Peyser's closing cadences are poignant. She borrows some terminology from an unidentified source to suggest the reason for the stubborn fondness of the musical public at large for the repertoire staples of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries:

> Neurophysiological evidence suggests that there are two separate modes of viewing phenomena. . . . One is holistic: the observer grasps the structure, the shape of the whole. The other is linear-analytic: the observer discerns the "atoms," the substructures of the work. The two are not mutually exclusive. Once the viewer or listener grasps the full shape, he is free to return and absorb the complexity of detail. What separates contemporary "serious" music from the great art of the past is its refusal to give the listener form that is immediately graspable. It is so heavily weighted with detail that it does not encourage the listener to return.

The situation has ramifications for composers as well. In 1973 Mrs. Peyser was present at a planning session for IRCAM at Boulez's home in the French Alps. The American serial composer Milton Babbitt was there. Boulez said he wanted—and, with the institute scheduled to open this year, he still wants—IRCAM to house not only musicians but scientists and technicians working on acoustical and electronic developments as well.

> Babbitt said the Institute would have difficulty attracting scientists.

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> "Mathematicians look down on physicists,' he said, 'And physicists look down on composers. The problem is how to confront an attitude that music does not belong in universities but in girls' finishing schools and that exhausts its cognitive content. At Princeton and Harvard one never finds scientists at contemporary music concerts. Scientists think we take ourselves too seriously; they are equally contemptuous of music and technology. Look at Noam Chomsky. To him music is folkdancing, not Schoenberg. Robert Oppenheimer thought of composers as talented children."
>
> Boulez agreed. . . .

When composers—who, after all, are closer than critics and listeners to the core of the musical experience—surrendered the claim of their art to an apprehension of the holistic beyond the reach of science, and embraced mathematics as the foundation of composing technique, did they not place music at the mercy of the condenscension of scientist and layman alike? Boulez still covets a central place for music in our culture, and is putting his chips on the pursuit of advanced acoustical and electronic means. But until the day he and his colleagues recover the holistic ascendancy of music, the art of the past will fill the void of the present.

Coincidentally, as if to reinforce Boulez's special position in our musical life, two further books have come to hand, one on Gustav Mahler and the other on Richard Wagner,[3] each touched in a different way by the Frenchman. Though the latter did not get to me in time to be included in this review, I can report that Boulez is among the parade of musicians the book deals with in traversing the hundred-year history of the Wagner shrine: Boulez's *Parsifal* and *Ring des Nibelungen* performances are significant moments in that history. The Mahler book combines some interesting iconography of the composer and the Austrian capital (rather too artily handled for my taste) with a series of essays, Boulez's contribution titled "Gustav Mahler Up-to-Date?" being given primacy of place. Among the others Hilde Spiel's, linking Mahler to Klimt and the Secessionists and other aspects of the *fin de siècle* cultural climate of Vienna, Marcel Prawy's on Mahler's tenure as director of the Vienna Opera (1897–1907), and Wolf Rosenberg's concluding ruminations—"Mahler has become a brand article. He is traded in every shape, in every type of packaging, depending on taste"—are outstanding. But Boulez's essay easily surpasses the others. A few of its paragraphs perhaps illuminate his own complexities in a way that Mrs. Peyser cannot:

> . . . What can be the value of music [Mahler's] whose relation of idea and form loses itself in the nether regions of expression? Here we touch on the end of a world which ruins its digestion through luxury, which drowns in superabundance; foolish arrogance is the worst and a senti-

[3] GUSTAV MAHLER IN VIENNA, edited by *Sigrid Wiesmann*, Rizzoli. $25.00. RICHARD WAGNER IN BAYREUTH, by *Hans Mayer*. Rizzoli. $18.50.

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mental apoplectic fit the best that can happen to such a world. Begone, obese and degenerate romanticism!

Begone? If the works insist on survival there is no begone . . .

Now that the time of cleansing is past we see that it has left some true skeletons behind in its path. But after this long period of inattention the authentic emerges once more, forces us to consider anew and stubbornly questions our negligence.

Were we guilty, were we superficial? Can we offer justifications? By the manner in which this work was presented to us—guarded by certainly devout but fanatically greedy hands (hands without that generosity which paves the way of the future by the means of the past), monopolized by the faithful (at what point does loyalty become treason?)—this work was capable of imbuing us with a full measure of distrust. A distrust that even made us suspect that the composers of the Vienna school [Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg, all admirers of Mahler] had succumbed to a sentimental, locally coloured attachment. At first glance, to be sure, the link was not obvious, the antinomies instead quite clear.

But after the Moderns had finished with ascesis, exuberance got hold of the consciousness—and the search of the past began, enriched by new modes of hearing, though the mind, alerted by recent experience, kept watch with painfully acquired vigilance.

Probably tired of clear directions, one-dimensional meanings, the mind dreams of multiplicities, of a world where the categories are too complicated to be understood too easily.

Order? Why this constraining word?

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Reviews

MARVIN MUDRICK

The Blind Men and the Elephant

CHAUCER IS A DARLING, he lacks the majestic testiness of most of the world's geniuses, he pays attention, has the common touch, seems as receptive and unthreatening as a baby; surely like you and me and John Gardner he was once a baby himself and experienced all the humanizing pristine postnatal sensations including of course—nosy little beggar—smells: "little Geoffrey," it says here,[1] reveled in sights and sounds and especially smells, "his big stepbrother's funny smell, the fierce, slightly frightening animal smells of his father and uncle Tom, the smell of his mother as wide and sweet and otherworldly as a meadow" (though this last smell may well have been the family cow's). Postnasal drips like Gardner come and go, but little Geoffrey ripened and ripened for half a century into the good gray poet who wrote a poem about a bad smell, dedicated to any dozen past and future psychobiographers: *The Summoner's Tale,* which concerns the duodecimal distribution of an old man's fart.

Not satisfied with inventing Chaucer's life, Gardner turns psychocritic and in his second book of the week[2] invents Chaucer's poetry, e.g. as it was affected by the politics of the time. Gardner keeps prompting us to draw the right inferences—i.e. his—from the fact that Chaucer was a government functionary during the reign of Richard II: "It should hardly surprise us," he asserts, radiating confidence, "that every one of the [Canterbury] tales in fragments II–V, written when Richard's near tyranny and the barons' disloyalty was on everyone's mind, is a tale which comments directly or indirectly on the interrelated ideas *constancy* and *patience* . . ."; but most of these tales have nothing to do with constancy or patience (one is *The Summoner's Tale*!), there's no evidence which closely dates any of them or indeed separates them by date from any of the other Canterbury tales, there's no evidence that anything at all was "on every-

[1] THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CHAUCER, by *John Gardner*. Knopf. $12.50.

[2] THE POETRY OF CHAUCER, by *John Gardner*. Southern Illinois University Press. $15.00. "This book was originally designed as the second half of a two-volume work called *The Life, Times, and Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, but when I'd finished what I have now published as *The Life and Times of Chaucer*, I saw that my discussion of the poetry couldn't be made to fit with my writing on Chaucer's life. Writing biography, I had felt free to touch up the picture here and there, never altering facts, I hope, but using the tricks of a novelist to heighten their effect a little. Writing about Chaucer's poetry, on the other hand, I use the second side of a novelist's brain—the lobe that calculates and squints . . ."; and introducing his "biography" he says that "my aim has not been startling originality but completeness, accuracy, and a measure of novelistic vividness." As he vividly hints for readers who don't already know, Gardner is also a novelist.

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one's mind" at the time, there's no evidence that the themes of Chaucer's poetry were skewed or determined by the politics of the time.

Still, since psychocriticism works hand in glove with psychohistory, it should hardly surprise us that the psychocritic doesn't distinguish between what on the evidence actually happened, what may be reasonably inferred to have happened, and what for his self-aggrandizing purpose ought to have happened. It's Gardner's purpose to show us how susceptible he is to the stunning insights which can be induced by the wealth of specialized information he shares with other medievalists; but he has to do a lot of filling in and faking ("using the tricks of a novelist") around the information because there isn't much of it that helps explain Chaucer, and because for Gardner mere fact isn't in any case vivid enough to induce stunning insights. So, looking scholarly, Gardner argues—what wouldn't have occurred to modern readers if he hadn't argued it—that writing a medieval poem which seems to modern readers wholly innocuous could be a very risky political act: Chaucer having written *Troilus and Criseyde,* his sympathetic and loving poem about love, Gardner commends him for having had the grit and pluck to come out with a humane love story at a moment in English history when, if the commendation is to mean something, armed bands must have been roaming the streets of London exclaiming that if they had horses they would horsewhip the first poet they saw who wrote humane love stories: "The humane and forgiving position Chaucer takes and justifies [in *Troilus and Criseyde*] was not an easy one to take in the mid-1380s, when Gloucester's star was rising and Chaucer and many of his friends were in trouble"; but Gardner's portentousness is as usual a barrel of horsefeathers, there's no evidence that Chaucer was "in trouble" during the mid-1380s or any other fraction of a decade, "Gloucester's star" hasn't even been astronomically identified let alone seen rising, *Troilus and Criseyde* was written by Richard II, black is white, and it's unlikely that Gloucester or Richard or Attila the Hun would have reprimanded a poet for writing a humane and forgiving poem about love-struck Trojans (Richard might on the other hand have been irked by "Lack of Steadfastness," a poem in which Chaucer advises him to pull himself together and behave like a proper king; but mere fact or reasonable inference doesn't interest Gardner).

Donald R. Howard is another medievalist who knows from the inside just which political and social pressures were hardest to resist during any particular medieval period, and just which moral reactions poets couldn't avoid having to them. It seems that during the period when *The Canterbury Tales* was being written (a longish stretch lasting fifteen years or more through all sorts of public vicissitudes, which may now and then have been overshadowed by private and unpolitical notions and feelings in the minds and hearts of poets as well as peasants)—during all this time Chaucer read the morning papers with anxiety and foreboding, and every afternoon and evening

> . . . experienced such distressing events in the English court, such enormous changes in the society, and such insecurity about the future,

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> that it affected the idea of his work. The idea was a sufficiently moral and religious one, but the style appropriate to that idea made it impossible to scold or to despair. His response was secular and pragmatic within the limits of a Christian ethic: the work was a book about the world—its values and manner, its style, had to be "worldly." In "Lack of Steadfastness" and "Truth" he made it plain that he believed man in this world could follow reason, "do law," and serve social justice. This would be man's bulwark against the world's decline. And he expressed that belief with the metaphor which gave to *The Canterbury Tales* its distinctive form: "Here is non home, here nis but wildernesse: / Forth pilgrim forth! . . . / Hold the high way."[3]

How could Chaucer have got any of his feelings or notions except by reacting to the turbulent world around him? The Gardner-Howard line is that the world shouted and Chaucer jumped; but the evidence indicates that Chaucer kept his counsel and kept his head, lived his private life, and may have been less worried and less combustibly moral about public affairs than modern medievalists make him out to be. It's for instance a fact that the only extant poem by Chaucer in which he explicitly reacted to a political event, "Complaint to His Purse," is a good-natured and playful appeal to the new king, Henry IV, for a continuation of the pension Chaucer had long ago been granted by the deposed and murdered Richard. True, Chaucer's mode of addressing Henry—"O conquerour of Brutes[4] Albyon"—obviously recalls that earlier usurper of the English crown, William the Conqueror; but it's possible to admire bold usurpers, Chaucer seems to admire Henry for having boldly emulated his great ancestor and perhaps for offering the prospect of a more stable reign than Richard's, there's nothing in the tone or argument to suggest that Chaucer was agitated or dumbfounded by an event which doubtless he considered the gravest political event of his lifetime. According to the Gardner-Howard line, though, Chaucer must have felt just awful about it ("Complaint to His Purse" therefore has to be ironic dissimulation or time-serving sycophancy), must have immediately begun revising *The Canterbury Tales* to feature an idea that could never have crossed his mind before—the mutability of created things.

The point of their hallucinations (the thorn in the flesh of these free spirits) is that Chaucer wasn't *free,* did what he did against the grain or in reluctant conformity or by reacting bravely or cravenly to forces much lordlier than himself—thus yet another medievalist

> . . . brings out a real irony in Chaucer's situation as a court poet. The son of a bourgeois is placed in an equivocal position when he writes for a courtly audience, and especially when he confronts his audience, as we

[3] THE IDEA OF THE CANTERBURY TALES, by *Donald R. Howard,* University of California Press. $15.00.

[4] According to medieval legend, the English Brutus was Aeneas' great-grandson and the first king of England.

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> know Chaucer did, by reading his works aloud. If he is to be a poet according to the ideal conception of the artist, he must impart wisdom to his audience, and they are bound to look up to him as an authority. Yet, since he comes from an inferior class and acts in the ordinary business of life as their servant, he is expected to defer to their taste and judgment. If he wants to instruct his audience, he must do so without ever seeming to forget his place. He is not free to write what he pleases but must choose those forms and subjects most acceptable to his audience.[5]

Chaucer was, so they say, often under the influence or under the thumb of somebody or other, for example the Italians: "The crowning architectural pleasure of Chaucer's tour [in 1372 to Italy, about which nothing is known except that he made it], a work that cannot help having influenced his artistic vision, subtly moving him toward his late, so-called realistic style . . . was Giotto's campanile [which hadn't been completed by the time of Chaucer's tour] . . ."; and the unimaginable Gardner plunges ahead to explain how Chaucer, probably while picnicking on the so-called Arno with the *Commedia* open in his left hand and a goblet of Valpolicella clenched in his right, discovered not only the feeling but the literary uses of compassion—"It is largely Dante's compassionate view of the sinful that makes possible Chaucer's similar compassion toward people undone by love, like Troilus" (observe the reasoning: Dante's compassion toward sinners, whom incidentally Dante himself has judged and found wanting and consigned to Hell, teaches the notorious grouch Chaucer to feel compassion toward broken-hearted lovers). Such sweaty derivativeness, known to psychocriticism as the anxiety of effluents, accounts no doubt for Chaucer's failure to achieve "coherence," which

> . . . would remain to the end of Chaucer's career not a product of his whole soul's conviction (like the coherence in the poetry of Dante or Goethe) but dramatization with the poet's judgment mostly suspended. Chaucer takes, that is, exactly the nominalist stance of philosophers like Roger Bacon, for whom truth is, outside doctrine, finally unknowable. When the Italian influence had deepened in him, strengthening his confidence in realism, Chaucer would create characters like the Wife of Bath, the Nun's Priest, and the Canon's Yeoman, who could so infuse their own personalities into the stories they told us as to create what Poe would call unity of impression. But for all the brilliance of his characterizations—his mimickry [sic], if you like—Chaucer was never a man like Shakespeare, or like his own less philosophical contemporary, the *Gawain*-poet, who "saw life whole."

(Chaucer sawed life in half and out tumbled hundreds of unpremeditated lives, because he didn't have the cast-iron grid of *a priori* coherence that makes reading Goethe, Shakespeare, or Dante an exercise in searching for

[5] THE STRUMPET MUSE, by *Alfred David*. Indiana University Press. $12.50.

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signs of life among the conventions, compulsions, self-justifications, proofs, wise saws, simple but powerful messages, and poetry. All the same, lacking the total hindsight of his betters, Chaucer was better off than his own Arcite, the unhappy lover in *The Knight's Tale* who according to Gardner saw life even less than half, "believing, in his maniacal nearsightedness, that no man ever suffered or will suffer as he does." In the kingdom of the blind, the maniacally nearsighted wear dark glasses.) Howard, however, is more charitable than Gardner toward Chaucer's shortcomings and believes that, though subject to many foreign influences, the poet probably worked out his ingenious idea for *The Canterbury Tales* by taking Howard's advice on how to write dialogue:

> . . . Chaucer did not make a representation of contemporary life or a portrait gallery or a framed series of tales, but a representation of memories and stories, a record of experience. It is mimetic, but that mimesis takes as its object a world within the mind. How did Chaucer learn this? From the dream-vision, perhaps. From medieval esthetics, perhaps. But I believe he may have learned it by learning to write dialogue. . . . Now writing dialogue is an extraordinarily hard knack to get, and many still believe that the writer must listen and then imitate on paper the speech he hears people speak. But this is not so. . . .

And Howard proceeds to list everything we always wanted to know but never dared to ask about dialogue. At all events, Chaucer got the knack, and so learned how to represent "a *group*. Like any group it is made of individuals, but it has a dynamics of its own based on interpersonal and social relationships. Like any group, it is a society in little." As for those readers who aren't sure how well an amateur like Chaucer understood "group dynamics," Howard's businesslike footnote on page 155 (no kidding, it's really there, check it out yourself) directs them to the authorities:

> On group behavior see George C. Homans, *The Human Group* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1950); Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1963); Philip E. Slater, *Microcosm: Structural, Psychological and Religious Evolution in Groups* (New York, London, Sydney: John Wiley, 1966).

Howard has a fund of snappy generalizations, as when he defends the dull Parson against the fascinating Pardoner: "If goodness is dull in literature—if Milton's Satan is more interesting than God, Iago more exciting than Desdemona—this is a fact not about goodness or about literature but about ourselves. Take someone to the zoo and he wants to see the snakes." But it doesn't occur to him that nothing in life or literature is more interesting and exciting than goodness: that Troilus, Criseyde, and Pandarus are all both good and wonderfully interesting; so too Elizabeth Bennet, Anne Elliot, Sophocles' Antigone, Pushkin's Tatyana, Trollope's Plantagenet Palliser, Lawrence's Tom Brangwen; so

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most of all the character Chaucer in Chaucer's poems, who is the best human being on record and marvelously interesting. And when someone takes *me* to the zoo I want to see the swans.

Howard has a thesis, something about *The Canterbury Tales* as "unfinished" but "complete." He believes that emitting any banality, commonplace, crude mistake, crude neologism ("bookness," "voiceness," "paperness"), lump of jargon, flower of rhetoric with loop-tape repetitiveness transforms it into an idea:

> I suggested earlier [and several hundred times] that we need to see *The Canterbury Tales* in two ways at once—on the one hand as a series of tales within an encompassing tale, on the other hand as an inexhaustible world of stories among which the story of the pilgrimage is only another pilgrim's tale. Such a double perspective characterizes the topos of the flower: the "rose" design represents order, perfection, and permanence, yet it represents as a part of such order the facts of change, flux, and transience which were symbolized by the wheel. John Leyerle has drawn attention to this combination of *rosa* and *rota* . . .

—and Howard believes that everything including the plain sense of the text must be sacrificed to his concatenated binary principle:

> If one takes such a binary structure and makes a concatenation, so that the second part of one pair becomes the first part of the next, and so on, one has the beginning of an interlaced narrative structure. It opens the possibility of interrupting an episode with a new episode, then returning to the interrupted episode. It has a "grammar" of its own, and the morpheme of that grammar is not the "episode" but the diptych structure: narrative unit + juncture + narrative unit. This concatenated binary principle is evident in *The Canterbury Tales*. The General Prologue presents a picture which is altered when we have read the tales; and the story of the pilgrimage—the General Prologue and the world of tales it generates—presents a picture which is altered when we have read the Parson's Tale and Retraction. It is the same within the series of tales: the ideas we have in mind when we have finished the Knight's Tale are thrown into a different light by the Miller's Tale. When Chaucer says we can "turn over the leaf and choose another tale" I believe he has this effect in mind: we turn from one tale to another without forgetting the first, but the second adds something to our experience, and if the tales touch upon a common theme it alters something. If we choose to skip a tale we miss something. . . .

Ignore for a moment Howard's "idea" that the effect of the tales is—who would guess?—cumulative and retrospective (don't think about the Donovan Professor of English at Johns Hopkins presuming to impose on us a 400-page book of unbearably musclebound Laocoön-like squirmings in celebration of such a novelty); just concentrate on the fact that, coming

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upon the passage in which Chaucer apologizes for the "cherles [churl's] tale" the Miller is about to tell—

> For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye
> Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce
> Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,
> Or elles falsen som of my mateere.
> And therfore, whoso list it nat yheere,
> Turne over the leef and chese another tale;
> For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale,
> Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse,
> And eek moralitee and hoolynesse.
> Blameth nat me if that he chese amys.
> The Millere is a cherl, ye knowe wel this;
> So was the Reve eek and othere mo,
> And harlotrie they tolden bothe two.
> Avyseth you, and put me out of blame;
> And eek men shal nat maken ernest of game.

—reading this transparent passage, the most helpless Hopkins freshman understands he is reading the funniest, cleverest, soundest, and most disarming argument against censorship ever set down (It's no fault of mine that the Miller doesn't talk like a parson, if you can't put up with a dirty story turn the page and you'll find a clean one, there are plenty of clean and classy ones coming along, don't make a Federal case out of a little fooling around); moreover the freshman will soon learn by reading the annual honors list for faculty that to say Chaucer is saying quite the opposite (Be sure you read every one of the tales because each is a comment on all the others) is to commit a deed of maniacally nearsighted thesis-diddling for which the penalties are a major research grant, a sabbatical year in London, and promotion to an endowed professorship.

"In literary criticism," remarks Alfred David, "one tends to steer away from the obvious and press harder and harder after some elixir to multiply the meaning of the text": the metaphors are mangled, but the point is well taken, and (as if Gardner and Howard don't suffice) David illustrates it himself, for instance in his deeply moved reading of Chaucer's Retraction:

> For myself, the Retraction, especially when taken in conjunction with the Parson's Prologue, is a deeply moving statement of the limitations of art, and one that is very difficult to answer. The justification of poetry is by no means a peculiarly medieval problem although the Christian Middle Ages give it a religious form. Plato had banished poets from his Republic. A legend has it that Virgil wanted the *Aeneid* destroyed. Tolstoy wrote a tract in his later years rejecting his great novels. Kafka asked that his literary remains be burned. The luxury of literature and the study of literature have never been easy to justify in a world torn by harsh necessity, wars, and relentless social struggle.

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> It is in this broader context that we must place the Retraction. In retracting his works Chaucer does not deny their right to exist, but he wants to warn us about the limitations of poetry lest they be misused, and he wants to be forgiven for the venial sin of having created something of such equivocal worth. . . .

And here is the relevant part of Chaucer's Retraction at the end of *The Canterbury Tales*:

> Wherfore I biseke yow mekely for the mercy of God, that ye preye for me that Crist have mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes; / and namely of my translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees, the whiche I revoke in my retraccioun: / as is the book of Troilus; the book also of Fame; the book of the xxv. Ladies; the book of the Duchesse; the book of Seint Valentynes day of the Parlement of Briddes; the tales of Caunterbury, thilke that sownen into synne; / the book of the Leoun; and many another book, if they were in my remembraunce, and many a song and many a leccherous lay; that Crist for his grete mercy foryeve me the synne. . . .

In sum, checking David against Chaucer, one discovers that David can't read any better than Gardner or Howard: because (1) the Retraction isn't difficult to answer it's impossible to answer if one is a medieval Christian on one's deathbed or at any other moment of terrified or agonizing contrition, (2) the Retraction is otherwise unnecessary to think about at all except for such light as it may shed on Chaucer's feelings late in life, (3) it isn't for a "venial sin" but for his not necessarily venial "giltes" that Chaucer hopes to be forgiven, (4) he condemns his poems not conditionally as "something of equivocal worth" but unequivocally as "worldly vanitees," and (5) it's for no other reason whatever than to "deny their right to exist" ("the whiche I revoke in my retraccioun") that he gives the names of the poems he condemns. But David is, as he might say, in the homestretch of his book steering away from the obvious and pressing harder and harder after some elixir that will metamorphose him for his smash ending into a medieval Goliath six cubits and a span high, with eyes like laser beams, wearing a pair of sandwich-boards that read in letters of fire: "Remember the deeply moving limitations of poetry!"

Such noodling philosophasters have taken Chaucer over by default because for five hundred years his English has looked like Dutch to the common reader, and because the literary channels of the language were soon choked up by Shakespeare's pathos and rhetoric. The assumption that literature is a knotty string of metaphors to be worked out with footnotes and commentaries isn't eternal truth, it's a legacy from Shakespeare; so is the assumption that for literary purposes life is less a pilgrimage of souls than a tribunal crowded with victims, malefactors, tears, and judgment. Shakespeare is as political and nervous as Gardner-Howard would like Chaucer to be: Shakespeare worries about dynasties and suc-

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cessions, public and private disorder, villains; about women, who are habitually getting out of line themselves or vamping men out of line; as for the women he favors, he doesn't so much idealize them to the level of Artemis or Aphrodite as domesticate them to the level of Mrs. Grundy's finishing school, so that an Imogen or Ophelia or Desdemona is as pretty as a picture and as likely to have thoughts or feelings inconsistent with the headmistress's expectations; or at any moment, grand master of the big bang, he can obliterate the merely personal—"You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires, / Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts. . . ."

Shakespeare is the bad conscience of the language; Chaucer is the alternative, the road not taken except by the colloquial language. When Cassandra interprets for Troilus his ominous dream of betrayal, she concludes with a characteristically versatile Chaucerian pun—

This Diomede is inne, and thow art oute.

—the home truth about Criseyde and her new lover that figuratively and literally defines Troilus's terrible loss. Chaucer writes for the human voice, whether it belongs to the prophetess Cassandra or the character Chaucer or such loving and unceremonious friends as Pandarus and Troilus:

"How hastow thus unkyndely [unnaturally] and longe
Hid this fro me, thow fol?" quod Pandarus.
"Paraunter [perhaps] thow myghte after swich oon [such a one] longe,
That myn avys [advice] anoon may helpen us."
"This were a wonder thing," quod Troilus.
"Thow koudest nevere in love thiselven wisse [manage]:
How devel maistow brynge me to blisse?"

(As for *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare's contemptible debasement of the same story, it is short on home truths, human voices, and common decency but teems with poetry, misogyny, and campaign speeches.) The power of the colloquial language to express the full range of experience has been exercised in literature only by Chaucer—most intensely in *Troilus and Criseyde*, a book about friendship and love and common decency, the greatest book in the world; most variously in *The Canterbury Tales*, in which everybody sooner or later runs into everybody else, as when in *The Pardoner's Tale* the three scoundrels, pursuing "this false traytour Deeth," encounter the mysterious old man:

". . . Why artow al forwrapped save thy face?
Why lyvestow so longe in so greet age?"
This olde man gan looke in his visage,
And seyde thus: "For I ne kan nat fynde
A man, though that I walked into Ynde,
Neither in citee ne in no village,
That wolde chaunge his youthe for myn age;

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And therfore moot [must] I han [have] myn age stille,
As longe tyme as it is Goddes wille.
Ne Deeth, allas, ne wol nat han my lyf!
Thus walke I, lyk a restelees kaityf [wretch],
And on the ground, which is my moodres [mother's] gate,
I knokke with my staf, bothe erly and late,
And seye, 'Leve [dear] mooder, leet me in!
Lo, how I vanysshe, flessh, and blood, and skyn!
Allas! whan shul my bones been at reste? . . .'"

The Pardoner, telling this supremely moral story of the three scoundrels, is himself a blasphemous scoundrel who as he boasts tells it in every country church to astound and swindle the poor and ignorant at the very altar, and tells it here on the pilgrimage to impress with his special talent an audience of respectable citizens who as he knows are themselves, most of them, in their different ways no better than they have to be and just as eager as anybody else to impress the world with their talents. We're all in the same boat, he would say; he sings bawdy songs with his chum the Summoner and drinks like a "good felawe" (but Chaucer the pilgrim remarks, "I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare"); his only mistake is to undervalue his talent and underestimate the effect of so tremendous a parable told by such a scoundrel ("For though myself be a ful vicious man, / A moral tale yet I yow telle kan"), when at the end of it he tries to ease this company of Christians back to earth by maybe making a joke of offering them his false relics and final absolution—

". . . Looke which a seuretee is it to yow alle
That I am in your felaweship yfalle,
That may assoille [absolve] yow, bothe moore and lasse,
Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe.
I rede [recommend] that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne,
For he is moost envoluped in synne.
Com forth, sire Hoost, and offre first anon,
And thou shalt kisse the relikes everychon [every one],
Ye, for a grote [small coin]! Unbokele anon thy purs."
"Nay, nay!" quod he, "thanne have I Cristes curs!
Lat be," quod he, "it shal nat be, so theech [so may I thrive]!
Thou woldest make me kisse thyn olde breech,
And swere it were a relyk of a seint,
Though it were with thy fundement [backside] depeint [stained]!
But, by the croys which that Seint Eleyne fond,
I wolde I hadde thy coillons [testicles] in myn hond
In stide of relikes or of seintuarie [reliquary].
Lat kutte hem of [off], I wol thee helpe hem carie;
They shul be shryned in an hogges toord!"

The Pardoner demands too much, and something—for instance, the

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Host's professional good-fellowship—has to give; but sooner or later it will all be knitted back together again:

> This Pardoner answerde nat a word;
> So wrooth he was, no word ne wolde he seye.
> "Now," quod oure Hoost, "I wol no lenger pleye
> With thee, ne with noon other angry man."
> But right anon the worthy Knyght bigan,
> Whan that he saugh [saw] that al the peple lough [laughed],
> "Namoore of this, for it is right ynough!
> Sire Pardoner, be glad and myrie of cheere;
> And ye, sire Hoost, that been to me so deere,
> I prey yow that ye kisse the Pardoner.
> And Pardoner, I prey thee, drawe thee neer,
> And, as we diden, lat us laughe and pleye."
> Anon they kiste, and ryden forth hir weye.

The pilgrims don't hesitate to make summary judgments of each other: "He was," pronounces the Friar, "if I shal yeven hym his laude [deserts], / A theef, and eek [also] a somnour, and a baude"; but no living souls are excluded from Chaucer's pilgrimage, not even Friars, Summoners, Pardoners, and Chaucerians.

Notes on Contributors (cont.)

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After spending the summer at Yaddo, LEWIS TURCO* is teaching at the State University of New York at Oswego.

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During the 1977-78 academic year, MARCIA B. SIEGEL will be teaching Dance and Movement Style at Sarah Lawrence College.

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Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

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PETER GLASSMAN

American Romances: Fiction Chronicle

> I wish Geraldine could get it fairly into her head that neither woman nor man, nor any kind of creature in this universe, was born for the exclusive, or even the chief, purpose of falling in love, or being fallen in love with. Good Heavens, it is *one* of the purposes most living creatures are produced for, but there remains for man, for woman and all creatures a very great number of other objects. —Thomas Carlyle

THE FRENCH OFTEN ARE SAID TO BE the people who think and care most about love. But it seems to me that it rather is Americans who live for love—who long to be in love and to center their existences about the acts and attitudes of loving. Surely few other societies can have valued love more highly than ours. More than almost any other people before us we seem to cherish the ability or, as we say, the "power" to love as the expression of a personality's ultimate maturity, meaningfulness, and beauty. We appear to believe that the gestures and emotions of love comprehend and justify the entire experience of life. The act or, as we often put it, the "art" of loving is with us virtually an ideology, replete with its own politics, language, totems, and courses of routine.

The contemporary American culture speaks with full imaginative intensity to few other subjects. Our films, television programs, magazines, drama, advertising, psychoanalytic discourse, even our journalism, all evince a profound interest in the experience of loving. Particularly our popular music attests to the fervency of our love of loving, the extremity of our passion for passion. The tones and dramatic tensions of our commercially successful tunes almost exclusively concern the discovery or the loss of love. With an apparently insatiable instinct of communion we listen to recordings of other persons' knowledge of what it is to love; to songs which echo our own longing to feel and to inspire desire. Whole (and immense) industries supply our appetite for such songs: the recording and phonograph industries now rival even the oil, computer, duplicating, cosmetic, and health-care industries in point of annual growth.[1] We insist that an extraordinary proportion of our technical ingenuity be reserved for

[1] Apparently the pet industry is one of the few commercial complexes which rivals the music industry in vigorousness of growth. Americans love animals as well as persons: we do love to love. Or perhaps the situation is less lovely than this. No one can accurately—or sanguinely—estimate how much pet food is consumed in our nation by people. Even as it undertakes to reinforce our instinctive adoration of particularly cats and dogs, the industry's advertising conspicuously tries to arouse human hunger for the foods which these delightful animals consume.

It need hardly be added that the pornography industry currently is one of the nation's most expansive, most commercially healthy corporate enterprises. The reasons for this industry's growth may have as much to do with our nation's hatred of love as with our love of love. I shall address this unsettling question in a moment.

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the service of our defining contemporary desire. We demand that our most advanced engineering skills be brought to bear upon the production of sophisticated devices for the recording and transmission of the songs of love. We equip our homes, automobiles, airplanes, boats, supermarkets, offices, lobbies, even our elevators with the soothing musical machinery which our geniuses manufacture. And still we are not satisfied. On those occasions when we feel compelled to abandon our buildings and vehicles for the more open, unmelodious universe we require as a right the opportunity to carry portable listening equipment with us—presumably so that we may, as the popular song goes, "color [the] world with love."

What perhaps is most odd about the American attitude toward love is the fact that in our society the status of the ability to love is exceeded only by the status of the inability to love. We love the ardent. But as a people we also are deeply drawn to the mechanical, the violent, the casual, the furtive, the merely neuter. Throughout our history we have been irresistibly attracted to the deliberate suppression of feeling. Cold and silent men move us. Icy and withheld women excite us. The impassive seem to us sexually authoritative. As we suggest when we speak of a person as "falling in love" we appear to believe that there exists a close connection between love and Fall, between the experience of passion and that of ruination or collapse. For this reason we find it possible to describe one who is not in love as "free." We speak of one who has become emotionally partnered with another as "attached"—as if a lien had been filed against his or her autonomy. We refer to an attractive or economically eligible person as a good "catch," as if he or she were a landed fish or a trapped animal. If we love those who love, we also believe that in the situations of love there lurk radical threats to one's liberty and even to one's potency. Can the Marlboro man ever appear with his lover? Can a Fred Williamson film end in marriage? Is Jim Brown ever photographed with his bride? Do we not secretly want Farrah Fawcett to divorce Lee Majors? Should not Vonetta McGee be "free?" Is not Margaret Trudeau immeasurably more interesting now than she once was?

Our apparently conflicting attitudes toward love are not wholly incompatible, though. For even when we celebrate love we commonly regard the act of loving as a cession of self. Americans find it difficult to conceive of love as anything other than a merging of oneself with another. We normally suppose that one must come to one's partner in love as an imaginatively emptied creature; that one receives from one's lover one's whole energy of feeling, one's entire instinct of life. Barbra Streisand is brought *to* herself by the men whom she loves in her songs. Karen Carpenter commences her career as a coherent intelligence only at the moment when she falls in love ("We've only just begun . . ."). Harold Melvin feels devastated in his very identity—time and again—by the loss of love. Americans appear to be drawn to those representations of love which suggest that passion acts as a monumental nutrition, or as a species of self-help. Rarely can we believe that lovers independently possess a center of assurance and calm. Rarely can we conceive that the partner-

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ships which are created by lovers may have more to do with confident mutuality than with unfocused dependency.

Precisely because we do conceive of love as a potentially absolute birth, we appear subliminally to fear and dislike the experience. A fruition so complete as we think love must be perforce exposes, we characteristically imagine, the extent of our initial and native nullity. "I had nothing at all," one of our singers warbles, "until I had you." Our entire conception of the process suggests that for us love involves at least as much reduction as fulfillment and expansion. We seem to suppose that if our lovers bring us excitation and joy, they also implicate us in shattering estimations of our organic health, repellent mensurations of our individual integrity and will. "If you leave me now," goes the most popular American song of 1976, "I don't know what I'm gonna do."

Perhaps the unconscious fear of romantic love may in part explain why Americans are so interested in explicitly sexual love. "Interested" is too neutral a word. We are nothing less than obsessed with sexuality in its most blunt and primitive articulations. We want endlessly to read about, to see, and to practice genital connection. The processes of directly sexual play fascinate us, tyrannize our imagination of desire. We believe, it appears, that genital sexuality permits us simultaneously to love and yet to continue "free;" to merge with another and yet to remain identifiable; to appear emotive, even tender, and yet to discharge more than a little aggression. We seem to consider that sexuality at once offers us the dividends and releases us from the primal costs of emotional love. This assumption, which is dear to us, permits us to suppose that we may momentarily couple with others without often entering into difficult states of knowledge about ourselves. The nation's currently most successful record contains the following verse:

> I'm so into you I can't think of nothing else . . .
> Thinking how it's gonna be
> When I get you next to me.
> It's gonna be good,
> Don't you know?
> I'm gonna love you all over,
> Over and over,
> Me into you,
> You into me,
> Me into you,
> Ooo-ooo-ooo.

This peculiar imaginative economy perhaps is fed by our ineradicably industrial mentality. In our abiding ecstasy with technocracy we seem to imagine that, unlike emotional love, organic sexuality is an acquirable and purely functional skill. We consider that we may learn the repertoire of sexual movements and signs from manuals, magazines, columns, films. We trust in what appears to be an infinite and now incorrigible way to the

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uses of sexual unguents and costumes. We assume that ticklers, vibrators and dildos, the whole sad machinery of contemporary sexual practice,[2] may be exploited as the modes of one's expressly personal satiation and expression. Our modern revolution, the separation of sexuality from love, of intercourse from procreation, seems to suggest itself to the American people as a strategy of resolution—as a way to conjoin the desire to love with the desire not to love. Our slick faith in formally free sexuality allows us to suppose that we are definable by our capacity to love, and that our capacity to love is definable as a sheerly physical procedure. Now more than ever before Americans appear substantially to agree that love is a necessary emotion. But we appear as well to agree that in all its vitality and variousness love is chiefly a practical talent. A manufacturing people, we believe that we can make love.[3]

What is the matter with us? Are we perhaps only marginally human? Can we really fear, as we seem to do, that we must either produce love—and such love as we imagine—or else cease to exist as knowable beings? Why do we find it so difficult to discover that love must exist as a culmination and not as the beginning of our careers as intelligences? How have we managed to remain such innocents, even as we destroy all our innocence?

The works of fiction which I gather here for review all are American, and all speak to the condition and the prestige of love in our society. Robert Penn Warren's new book was the first novel to come my way this spring.[4] One had heard a good deal about *A Place To Come To* and had hoped that the work would be what Warren's publicist calls it, "the capstone of a brilliant literary career." Warren's career has been brilliant but this blocked and tendentious capstone is a grave disappointment.

The novel promises to fill a large canvas. Throughout *A Place To Come To* Warren suggests that he means to explore the whole circumference of the common human routine, that he intends to summarize all that he has felt and known about "the general human destiny." Warren's valediction is to be fierce, we gather, a violent criticism of "the sad limits and metes" of our experience. The perimeters against which he reacts are quickly located.

[2] The intensity of our impulse to conceive of sexual love as a mechanical operation may be gauged from certain current idioms of popular American speech. On the playgrounds at least of New York City young men frequently refer to arousing women as engines. "Hey," they may call. "You a *ma*-chine." (The phrase probably originates from a recording by The Miracles called "I'm a Love Machine." Or the other way around?) American women long have referred to the penis as a "machine": e.g. "Has he got an engine on him!" Similarly, it is a convention of English-language pornography to describe the erected penis as an "Engine." The apotheosis of the judgments which these expressions imply is to be found in Isaac Hayes's title song for the film "Shaft" (itself a complicated and fascinating word). The song begins, wonderfully: "*Who* is that black private dick, sex machine to all the chicks? Shaft. Damn right."

[3] Here as always our language expresses our assumptions and desires. We currently speak of "making it" when we wish to describe the acts of making love, achieving orgasm, creating marriages or liaisons, and attaining pleasure in general. We even use the phrase to describe the genuineness of one's emotions. "I'm only faking it," Paul Simon sings, "Not really making it."

[4] A PLACE TO COME TO, by *Robert Penn Warren*. Random House. $10.00.

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The novel's most appealing character (who dies, significantly, before the onset of the novel's narrative time), raves to his son: "Jesus—what a man is! Setten in a wagon in the middle of the night with a bottle in his hand and looken at a mule's ass!" Jediah Tewksbury, the novel's narrator and hero, consents without a struggle to his father's brusque judgment. We are all "trapped in some irreversible process," Jediah remarks, "as though we were coffee beans dropped in a grinder as big as the world." The novel is full of such angry and young but more than faintly exhausted expressions.

Against this bleak impression of "pitiful emptiness" Warren sets the possibility of "a wild nobility." He suggests that the blank scene of "process" may be made to open, if at all, by the ferocity of individual human demand, by the insurgent imperiousness of genuinely personal wit and will. One must learn, the novel maintains, to be "remarkable." One must develop "the talent," "the gift," "the vision" of absolute authenticity. Occasionally the "clear generosity of feeling," the "willingness to live" for which the novel stands, seems to Warren to be discoverable in formal knowledge. Jediah, who is a literary scholar, supposes that "if you find the names for all the things of a world, you could create a world that was real and different." He conceives that "an idea touched with passion . . . touches life at the root." All well and good—save for the fact that the novel's characters more commonly believe in passion than in passionate intelligence. A conspicuously American work, *A Place To Come To* usually contends that we may learn to know ourselves and to know others only by committing ourselves to a program of sexual discovery. *"Debatuo ergo sum,"* says Jediah. "I fuck, therefore I am." It is a remarkable moment in the history of moral thought! The novel's heroine supports her lover's primitive and brutal metaphysic. "The first time we ever started to make love," Rozelle Hardcastle declares, "was the first time for anything for me, for I swear my real life didn't begin till that minute."

There are a great many scenes of closely described sexual encounter in *A Place To Come To* because the work's vision, all its expectations and knowledge, are based upon its imagination of passional play. What a pity, then, that Warren cannot write well about sexuality. In part this is because his characters, although powerfully sexed, are not sexually inventive. They conceive of coition but their ideas about tactility are not subtle enough to support the tiers of exterior meaning, of actual ideology, which their author imposes upon them. Warren's conception of sexuality in fact is merely motive. His characters contrive no unusually supple or even sweet vocabulary of sexual affect, no strong and complex topography of oral and aural understanding (particularly their olfactive sensibilities are limited). The novel's sexual scenes are inhibited, too, by the specific political purposes which Warren expects the acts of physical love to fulfill. The book's people are made to couple with a furious wish to define. They approach one another with the belief that in their sexual union they must not only uncover but as well create "the deep and rich slime of being," "the deep, warm, dark inwardness," "the center of life." Such uses of sexuality perhaps are feasible for persons who come to their love as richly and independently located personalities. Warren's characters, though,

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can take only physical discharge from their sexual experience. Because no one in the novel shapes his own arc before trying to enter into another's, the work's characters cannot give each other the "pure and self-contained perfection" for which they each hunger. At one point in the narrative, for example, Jediah remarks: "Maybe I—whatever the I was—was nothing but a dream the body was having." What can such a man discover from a woman? What can such a man bring to a woman? Warren's characters have no place to come to (the vulgar pun is implied throughout the novel) because they possess no seeds of origin, no ova of self-certainty. They are arid and almost precultural forms of life, oosperms and oospheres in search of oogonia. Their sex necessarily is as stricken as their sensibilities: missionary rather than sensual, frantic rather than florescent, sought rather than spontaneous.

The paucity of the novel's imaginative range clots Warren's prose just as it clots his characters' love. *A Place To Come To* is full of interminable clausal sentences. Predicates are withheld with Teutonic abandon. Worse, Warren continually tries to use words as his characters try to use sex. Of Rozelle, to cite only one instance, he writes:

> She walked with her head slightly bowed . . . the already incredible eyelashes portcullis-ing against the world the lowered eyes, which I did not yet know were of an incredible amethystine light, the color shading from the brightness of sunlit water to an undertint of blue-gray, as when the summer clouds gather above the cliff but the rain has not yet begun.

Warren's relation with nature is scarcely less labored. He speaks, for example, of "the lazy, rippling gray-green liquefaction of the shadow of the chinaberry tree, with the blaze of light all around." Passages of this sort are not credible descriptions because they are not felt: they are representations in the sense which Ruskin discovers in "Of the Pathetic Fallacy." Warren crassly and constantly appropriates language. He wants words not to describe but actually to comprise the specifications and primal energies of existence. As if he failed to comprehend that life is after all more and other than lexical, Warren asks words to flood *themselves* upon the narrative surface—just as his characters ask their orgasms to stand as the psychic substance which presumably orgasms are only suited in some minimal respect to satisfy.

It saddens me to react so harshly against this expressive but repellent novel. I venerate Robert Penn Warren as a man of consummate gifts—as a man whose gifts, in Warren's own fine phrase, always have been most uncommonly "pure and self-contained." Throughout his life Warren has given too generously of his purity and fearless purposefulness for one to feel altogether comfortable about savaging a work which apparently means much to him. The book, though, seems to me rotten at its core, cankered and crippled by its uncritical submission to the American mythos of sexual love. *A Place To Come To* is not a wise work. It is not even, once one compels oneself to stand outside one's admiration for its author, a fully serious work. The nature and extent of its limitations, the extremity of its exhaustion, suggest that Warren has concluded his career as an

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important writer. Like Mohammad Ali he perhaps owes it to his art to retire.

Lancelot is not Walker Percy's best novel but it is a conscientious and engaging entertainment.[5] The work is narrated by one Lancelot Andrewes Lamar, whose accidental discovery that he has been cuckolded by his extraordinary wife leads him to rise up against his betrayers and the mephitic social order which he believes has authorized their criminality. Lancelot's narrative consists of a protracted (and often most amusing) indictment of our banal but noxious age. "Something has happened to us," he insists, "which is so bad that we don't even have a word for it . . . God and [the] signs of his existence, the order and beauty of the universe—that's all washed up and you know it." The characters who inhabit this devastated landscape find it appropriately impossible to develop fundamental psychic structures. They rather assemble possibilities, affect styles, adopt locutions. The protagonists of this curious novel propose themselves less as coherent moral agents than as momentary accretions. "How odd Elgin was," says Lancelot, "switching back and forth from house nigger to young professor." Dana, a film actor, strikes him as "a blank space filled in by somebody else's idea." A cousin is knowable only as "a new broad manner he'd hit upon, found possible." Lancelot cannot any more directly fix his own character. He seems even to himself nothing more discriminable than "the Louisiana outlander . . . ill-at-ease among the easy ingrown Georgians and Carolinians." Personalities so artificial, so psychically costumed as these understandably fail to develop and to preserve legitimate sensations. "The only emotion people feel nowadays," Lancelot remarks, "is interest or the lack of it . . . Emotions? Were there ever such things as emotions? If so, people have fewer emotions these days." They have fewer relationships, too. Marriages and friendships almost always fail in *Lancelot*. Families cannot hold together. No one feels connected to his town or nation. All the affectual bases of social mores, all the principal grounds of humanness, seem to Lancelot to have become culturally canceled.

Lancelot supposes—this is an exaggeratedly American sensibility—that carnal knowledge can be exploited as a principal of alternative to the vacuousness of contemporary experience. In a full flush of only barely ironic communion with the prevailing national persuasion Lancelot declares:

> . . . The only important, certainly the best thing in life, is ordinary sexual love . . . Sex is not a category at all . . . but is rather a unique ecstasy, ek-stasis, which is a kind of possession . . . The orgasm is the only earthly infinity.

For such characters as *Lancelot* concocts, this dreary and offensive conception perhaps must be made to suffice as a defining vision. Percy in any case is able to plot only two other focuses of hope. He allows Lancelot to believe in violence, which he argues is at least "real." And he permits his hero to speak on behalf of what he calls "a certain coldness," "the

[5] LANCELOT, by *Walker Percy*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $8.95.

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possibility of hate." This is to say that the discovery of our universal "catastrophe" seems to Lancelot the beginning of one's renewal; he believes that the impulses of indignation and shock may themselves become pressed into service as a force of vitalization. "How strange it is," Lancelot tells us, "that a discovery like this, of evil, of a kinsman's dishonesty, a wife's infidelity, can shake you up, knock you out of your rut, be the occasion of a new way of looking at things!"

Lancelot might have been a more consequential work if its hero in fact could fabricate a new way of looking at things. Lancelot leaves the novel, though, committed only to a perfecting of the old—to a search for better sex, a more faithful sexual partner, and a more pure expression of his violent impulses. Percy's novel is funny and worth reading. But it is a contrivance, as its clumsy and adolescent invocation of Arthurian mythology implies. Percy's serious and superbly graceful religiousness, his delicate sense of craft, his bold and frolicsome intelligence require a more fertile imaginative base than he has been able to fashion in this slight and essentially silly book.

About Shirley Ann Grau's new novel I cannot feel even so enthusiastic as this.[6] I have never experienced the appeal which many other readers have discovered in Grau's work: Grau always has seemed to me a pedestrian, distinctly effortful novelist. *Evidence of Love* strikes me as her least impressive book. The history of a rich Louisianian, his son, and his daughter-in-law, the novel means, I gather, alternately to shock and to console us. The excesses of Grau's characters are tame enough, though, involving as they do nothing more terrible than coldness, blasphemy, calculation, egotism, lust, sexual unconventionality. This will seem a provocative catalogue of energies but in Grau's heavy hands all the quotients of psychologically aberrant behavior somehow do not occasion response. Gide's Michel, Conrad's Kurtz, Mann's von Aschenbach conceive of their own extremity as a resource and a project. Grau's Edward Milton Henley wants only, like an errant schoolboy, to feel entertained. Stephen Henley wants simply to be left alone. Lucy Henley wants just to want something. Nor is Grau significantly less puerile than her tedious characters. The novel is scarred by repeated auctorial pronouncements upon the fragility of love, the evanescence of life's structures and meanings, the general vapidity of humankind. For example, Grau has the novel's heroine remark about her daughter-in-law: "She thinks exactly what every nearly middle-aged mother of two children thinks . . . Nothing at all." An arrogance so comfortable as this—authorial as well as fictitious—hardly can seem to us authoritative upon the subject of love and its evidences.

Whether she undertakes to unsettle us by dismissing the possibilities of love or to console us, as she tries to do in the novel's third section, by approving of the diversity and resilience of the human spirit, Grau manages only, I fear, to define the pronounced limitations of her own sensibility. I know of no other established American writer who teaches one less.

[6] EVIDENCE OF LOVE, by *Shirley Ann Grau*. Alfred A. Knopf. $7.95.

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Evidence of Love may be an insignificant book but at least it is harmless. Anne Roiphe's new novel is not harmless.[7] *Torch Song* seems to me an actively dangerous work, irresponsible in its assumptions and malignant in its effects. The novel traces the history of a young woman's emotional and sexual dependency upon a severely psychotic young man. Disgusted by the modalities of her parents' lives, disaffected from the conventions of the wider culture, Roiphe's heroine, a New York girl called Marjorie Weiss, takes the evidently unavoidable American step of relying upon sexual love to confer an idea of personality and purpose *upon* her. "Perhaps if I took good enough care of him," Marjorie declares, "he might return the devotion in some kind of currency . . . I wanted my life as well as his to be used . . . I would always take care of him, and so I was safe." The vision is bathetic, and both Roiphe and Marjorie know that it is. But the circumstance that Marjorie's lover is a writer intensifies the situation's appeal for author and heroine. Both imagine that Marjorie affiliates herself with a full-fledged genius; and both believe that genius necessarily must have to do with madness and evil. The various reductionisms of this view are themselves sad. What is worse is the fact that the novel's mad, bad genius (who is called Jim Morrison—after The Doors' lead singer?) is a laughable creation, a lesser Edward Milton Henley or an hilariously misunderstood Byron (Roiphe has the audacity to liken her ludicrous figure to Rimbaud!). Roiphe's Jim Morrison is less evil than naughty, less vile than impertinent. Incontinent, abusive, epically selfish, Jim is offensive and perhaps even in some baroque way repugnant. Yet, he is not wicked. He has nothing to do with sinfulness. He knows nothing of profanation, abomination, or the demoniac. It remains true that only Henry James and Norman Mailer among American authors comprehend the full actuality of evil.

As if she understood her inability to conceive of the genuine condition of unreason, Roiphe elects, like a child at play with filth, to represent rituals of defilement, ceremonies of debasement. To salve her own obstructed impulses she assaults *our* sensibilities with protracted and polluted descriptions of enemas, untimely menstruation, projectile vomiting, sexual extravagance. Unable imaginatively to confront the reality of psychosis or sin, she writes silhouettes of ugly surface. Because she cannot creatively enter into the authentic processes of alien consciousness she chooses, like Alan Lelchuk in *American Mischief,* crudely to sully our sense of modesty. I consider Roiphe's situation grossly unsavory. Preoccupied by "mudbaths of unreason where I refused, was too fearful to go," she allows herself to become aesthetically indecent, systematically but superficially shameful. In this respect *Torch Song* is more than merely a narratively weak novel. It is deeply and coarsely obscene.

Marjorie releases herself from her fictional obsessions by becoming a mother and subsequently marrying a more healthy man. That her author releases herself from her own unfortunate needs in this disagreeable work seems to me much less certain. I am aware that I am offering a tactless notice. I feel impelled to do so by my conviction that the writer whom I

[7] TORCH SONG, by *Anne Roiphe.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $8.95.

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review is too skilled and serious a novelist either to require or to inspire emptily supportive treatment. Roiphe's verbal talents are considerable but they can become neither fulfilled nor socially useful until she more thoroughly civilizes her intelligence.

R. G. Vliet happily is one of our most civilized writers, and he published this spring his most accomplished and promising work.[8] Set in Texas in the early 1880's, *Solitudes* concerns what Vliet calls "wildness," a quality of spontaneity and animal abandon which seems to this poet who writes novels sexually arousing, closely related to both sanity and pathology, and, if profoundly dangerous, morally compelling. The novel's hero, Claiborne (or Claib) Sanderlin, is the book's most wild creature. Inarticulately intelligent, barely verbal, superbly responsive to the designs of the world, the word, and his own personality, Claib proposes himself as a more or less sublime Clint Eastwood. In Eastwood's classically American way Claib reduces himself to the sum of his appetites and functions. Lust, hunger, fatigue, satiety shape the curve of his experience and expectations. Like Eastwood's persona he understands that *"the thing is to keep movin'."* Move Claib does: *Solitudes* is built about the long and lyric series of its hero's grazing migrations. A land animal gifted with catholic expertise, Claib traverses whole tracts of space which he does not expropriate but rather fills with his own thought and severely efficient use. As he moves, this exquisitely self-aware high plains drifter organizes a stunning meditation upon the nation's nature, a bold and lovely, semantically cinematic discourse upon the character of our country's countryside, mythologies, psychic rhythms, and interior meanings.

The novel's drama, the tendencies of its actual story line, seem to me its chief flaw. As his title suggests, Vliet feels less interested in Claib's proficiency for life than in his loneliness and alienage—in everyone's loneliness and alienage. One of Claib's lovers remarks, touchingly: "I'm so God-awful lonesome. I been all the time lonesome . . . Oh, Red, take care of me" (Claib is known by many names in the novel. It is a symptom of his practicableness that he consents to be called anything so long as everyone recognizes his primary nature). Vliet does not feel finally able to serve his attractive conception of "wildness." American that he is, he tries to redeem his hero from solitude and, here, from freedom by causing him to become dependent upon the appeals of sexual love. The decision strips Claib of his coherence and imaginative authority. Worse, it involves the narrative itself in considerable sentimentality and structural irresolution. It is a curious circumstance that *Solitudes* at once triumphs over the Americanism of its materials and ultimately staggers beneath its weight.

However infelicitous in the devices of its ending, *Solitudes* is an impressive achievement. Particularly I admire Vliet's prose. His language is provokingly inventive, remarkable in its images, lithe and intriguing in its patterns of sound. Few other of our writers enjoy so full and responsible a relation with nature. Few other of our writers have so quick an ear for idiom and argot. Few other of our writers possess so swift and fresh a feeling for human eccentricity, so active a love for the multiformity of our

[8] SOLITUDES, by *R. G. Vliet*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $8.95.

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kind. Vliet's attitude toward the human community, his entire vision of existence, presumably has been instructed by Dickens. Certainly his stirring and elegant novel shares much of Dickens' own warm, confident energy. *Solitudes* has limitations of a disturbing kind. But Vliet's powers unquestionably will expand. Already he is one of our most creative and affecting novelists, a writer whose work in both its triumphs and temerities will seem to most of us indispensable to our understanding of ourselves.

I feel no less strongly about the work of Ann Beattie.[9] I can think of no other American writer save Thomas Pynchon who has found so wide and respectful an audience so early in her career. No one who has a serious interest in contemporary fiction can fail to be aware of Beattie's abrupt and alarming stories. Their publication in book form marks, I believe, a genuine event in the national life.

I suppose that one first feels struck by Beattie's consummate technical virtuosity. Her frigid prose, the shocking inexorableness of her humor and narrative designs, the macabre and spare efficiency of her thought, conspire to project her tales as actual—if rather awful—occurrences of modernist existence. I have called Beattie's prose cold: but one must read this most wicked and witty writer very closely indeed. It is true that she assembles as subjects a grotesque community of dwarfs, fats, gargoyles, and sluts, a bizarre collection of the lonely, the disoriented, and the dispossessed. Never, though, does she permit her figures to seem merely apathetic or aimlessly malcontent. Nor does she ever dismiss them as freaks. Beattie constructs her stories from within a soft and subtle sensibility of sympathy, participation, and hopefulness. She understands that, however capricious or queer, her characters' pains have their origin less in the morasses of individual neurosis than in the insipidity of the culture at large, the withering vapidity of the historical processes which envelop one and with which one must manage to coexist in some sort of emotional relation. It is the sign of her extraordinary intelligence and gentleness that Beattie considers her fictionalized people to be as human as their author; that she regards her own suffering as conterminous with that of her roughly satirized characters.

Beattie comprehends, this is to say, that we are driven into our misery and peculiarity because, appropriately, we cannot accommodate the abstraction and absurdity which surround us. Her characters fervently want to feel; especially they long to love. But the rapidity and monstrousness of contemporary history, the dearth of external supports for even the minimal impulses of human life, seem to the stories' people to invalidate the very possibility of achieving affective experience. A woman called Cynthia wonders, "What am I trying to think about? . . . It is cold in the kitchen, and she is not hungry so much as empty . . . . She shivers with the coldness of it." A man named David's "feelings were so clichéd that he couldn't go through with them." "Ah, Wanda," says Ray. "You know that the world always dumps on you." Cynthia "begins to think that it's Nixon's fault—all of it . . . Damn you Nixon, she thinks. Damn you."

[9] DISTORTIONS, by *Ann Beattie*. Doubleday. $7.95.

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"Death. Death everywhere," mourns another poor soul. "Japan, Viet Nam. Mortuary Science." Although they know that "death is everywhere," Beattie's characters insist that their lives become fruitful. Their humane and courageous hunger for the sensation at least of fellowship leads the stories' people to contrive strained and desperate terms of association with one another. In *Distortions* marriages become desiccated and collapse. Affairs terminate. Families disintegrate. Connected persons wantonly wrench and devastate one another. Couples eat junk food, smoke marijuana, drink liquor, listen to music, or listlessly sleep together rather than talk to one another. Particularly these molested and minified people try to anthropomorphize animals: Beattie's narratives almost invariably involve distorted emotional uses of cats and dogs, extreme and more than vaguely psychotic interactions with perplexed domestic beasts. Yet, none of this symptomatology of disjunction diminishes the fact that Beattie's characters do try to engage one another. However contorted, however abused, the experiment of partnership proposes itself in these rich and yearning tales as a bright and beckoning, if a haphazard, imaginative necessity. In this sense Beattie's characters are larger than the world which they occupy and more noble than their actual biographies. Like figures in cartoons they pop up whole and breathing and anxious for further knowledge no matter how often they get themselves squashed by their intransigent urge to discover the undiscoverable.

Beattie's master, no doubt too masterfully before her in *Distortions*, of course is Samuel Beckett (she names characters "Sam" with teasing frequency). Like Beckett, Beattie often is somewhat locked by her vision. Her judgments and her art are so defined, as it were so preconceived, that she does not always leave room for herself, her characters, or her readers to create independent responses to the circumstances which she invents. But Beattie also is as brave, and for that matter as funny, as Beckett. She sets no limits to the implications of her thought: she is willing to insist that things are exactly as they appear to be. Too, Beattie's powers grow considerably more sophisticated as her work progresses. Her most recently published piece, a story called "Shifting," suggests that she already begins to release herself from her closed and in some measure overly convinced world view. The publication of "Shifting," taken together with the simultaneous appearance of *Distortions* and *Chilly Scenes of Winter*,[10] makes it vividly apparent that a new and important talent has come into being in our country. I feel the greatest trust in the health of Ann Beattie's talent, and the greatest sense of excitement about the body of work which she is producing.

Thomas Carlyle once remarked to his wife that "Gibbon is a man whom one never forgets . . . The perusal of his work forms an epoch in the history of one's mind." I confidently expect that one day we shall say as much about John Casey. *An American Romance*, Casey's wonderful first novel,[11] leaves one in a stunned and joyous state: the work seems to me

[10] CHILLY SCENES OF WINTER was reviewed in THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. XXX, No. 1 (Spring 1977).

[11] AN AMERICAN ROMANCE, by *John Casey*. Atheneum. $9.95.

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unquestionably the finest novel to be published in our nation in at least a generation. A narrative of intricate emotional complexity, a narrative altogether in sympathy with the situations and claims of complexity, *An American Romance* is simply a masterwork—an achievement which I can think to liken only to *Clarissa* and the late work of Henry James in its involvement with love, its faith in language, its passionate commitment to society and mind. But unlike Richardson and James, Casey is gifted with a whole imagination. Nothing human appears alien to him. He receives and revives the full filamentary curves of our love and longing, our desire and need. He edits out nothing of our pleasure and pain, our serenity and sorrow, our solidarity and solitude, our civility and barbarousness, our vitality and morbidity. He enters into cities and villages, apartments and farms, streets and streams. He embraces other literature and other modes of knowledge—theater, television, cinema, dance, labor, sport, sexuality, and the life of ongoing domestic routine. Casey's brilliant and beautiful novel offers itself as a version of the entire known world.

Nothing is more attractive and responsible about *An American Romance* than its philosophy of characterization. Casey encounters each of his subjects as minds—as luxuriantly active intelligences which are knowable precisely in the processes of their continuing and fully authenticated consciousness. All action in the novel submits itself to this controlling principle of Casey's assumption. Nothing occurs aimlessly in the narrative; all things which narratively take place seem to Casey to express comprehensible and therefore valuable meanings. In this regard men and women unfailingly make decisions of character in *An American Romance*. They love or cease to love, have pleasure or cease to have pleasure, at the behest of their thought. The work demonstrates that everything which one does or fails to do may be seized as a recognition of self, and for that reason validated. Especially is this true of the characters' sexual experience. Systems of sensation overlap in *An American Romance* in a most provocative way. Characters' intellectual impressions charge the flesh, which in turn equips the intelligence for new and triumphantly elevated orders of responsiveness. In Casey's imagined world sex, like every other human activity, is enacted by the body but supervised (and richly served) by the intellect. His protagonists love as they live: from the fount of their natures. We are in the presence here of a revivalist. For by believing as fully as he does in the authority of the rational will Casey restores love and sexuality as legitimate expressions of the individual personality.

Casey's title, which perhaps parodies Mailer's, emphasizes the importance which he wishes to place upon the act, here an actual art, of achieving love. Casey believes that romance is the vessel of our humanity; that in the ways which we love we bring into released and final articulation all that we are as beings. The love which the novel's heroine and hero discover for one another justifies their author's salubrious vision. Anya and Mac devise a romance which draws into play more refinement of thought, more variety of personation, more emotional risks and satisfactions, than are to be found in any other American fiction of this century with the exception of *The Wings of the Dove, The Ambassadors,* and *The Golden*

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Bowl. To adduce the lesson of the master is to point to the high significance of Casey's accomplishment. Like James, Casey extends our sense of how much may be claimed by and for the mind. One may go further. The resonances of Anya and Mac's confrontation seem to me effectively to recover civilization as the proper and inviting field of human experience. I am proposing that every reader of this unsentimental, luminously lovely work will be likely to rediscover pleasure in the fact of his socialness, to rediscover confidence in the salutariness of sanity and the modes of passion which sanity contrives. *An American Romance* acts as a manifesto of human possibility, an exquisite invocation and metaphor of the sweet circumference which we may hope to inhabit.

Civilization periodically renews itself by calling such intelligences as John Casey's into creative and public service. Casey's novel is a work of civil reconstruction, a testament of holy value for our taut and fatigued society. We may regard it as an occasion for celebration and hope that in this time of critical national need we have become blessed with the presence of so capacious and wholesome an interpretation of ourselves. We desperately need this good book and the energies of human regeneration which it seems to herald.

I have maintained in this essay that a society's literature is not separable from its life, that a polity may discern its condition from the varieties of art to which it gives rise. The works of literature here under review suggest that our circumstances are perilous but that we remain a superbly hopeful and spiritually belligerent people. Our current fiction declares that, whatever the nature of our deceitfulness and diminution, however blocked and self-victimized we may be, we continue to exist as the world's most open and generously aspiring community. Our literature indicates that, although we often violently and vulgarly defile our virtually unbounded opportunity to particularize experience, we also appear persistently to demand the privilege of personality. The American romance with individual identification is obviously in great danger. Yet, the fictions of this season in the United States confirm that no other contemporary culture so forcefully, so religiously insists upon the propriety and priority of character.

A crucial juncture for the destiny which we manifest lies before us. In the coming decades we shall choose whether we mean to serve our falsity and exhaustion or to nourish our founding dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We cannot become a more capable people by reading books. But as we confront the traditional American impulse to authenticate the imagination of existence we may look to literature to suggest to us the ongoing successes and failures of our enterprise. We may look to literature, this is to say, to define for us the laxity of our philosophy, the slackness of our will, and the continuing urgency of our adventure. We may ask ourselves to read as presumably we ought to ask ourselves to live—with the desire to know the truth about ourselves and the hunger to become more freely in love with the demanding American romance.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

The Six Modern Poets

—Which Six Modern Poets?
—Hardy, Yeats, Frost, Stevens, Pound, and Eliot, of course.
—Then by "modern" you mean somewhere between 1890 and 1940?
—Yes, that's what it's turning out to mean.

TWENTY YEARS AGO AN EX-COLLEAGUE OF MINE used to urge that someone discover a new word to label those heroic spirits who made the first half of this century in America and England so poetically distinguished. Could we really get along with using a loose term like Modern to tie up Frost and Eliot in the same package? And is anything since World War II "contemporary," even as we move towards the 1980's? As you may have noticed, the new word still hasn't appeared, and college course catalogues are serving up the same old fare with a few names added here and there, as representative of Modern Poetry. Perhaps the time has now come to see the wisdom hidden in our inertia, and insist upon the virtues of our laziness by declaring that it is as justifiable to speak of The Modern Poets, meaning the six named above, as it is to speak of The Romantics: Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Byron. Having forcibly united them under a label about whose meaning and legitimacy one has deep confusions and reservations, all sorts of wonders may follow nonetheless.

Matthew Arnold's essays on four of the Romantics were published between 1879 and 1888 and greatly benefited from the comparisons he so brilliantly made among them. One hundred years later, almost, there is still a reluctance to conceive of the six modern poets in juxtaposition and comparison (I plan to make such an attempt, though not here). But Pound and Eliot, Yeats and Pound, at one point or another were almost as thick as Wordsworth and Coleridge; Frost and Stevens probably as respectfully wary of each other as Keats and Shelley; and even if as an old man Hardy didn't have the privilege of perusing Stevens' *Harmonium* (what would he have thought of "A High Toned Old Christian Woman"?) Shelley never even knew that Blake was alive. Perhaps one is being too exclusive, or too much influenced by the magic number of Romantics, in fixing on these later six as preeminently the modern poets. Doubtless there are readers who would prefer to substitute Hart Crane or William Carlos Williams for Frost or Pound; while Edwin Arlington Robinson has his own claims for inclusion. My own feeling is that in amplitude, variety of interest, brilliance of sound, depth and range of human experience, Robinson, Crane and Williams fall just short of the others' full achievements.

At any rate the books to hand deal in various ways with The Six. Biographical in intent, or collections of previously uncollected materials, none of them does much of the comparison and analysis Eliot defined as

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the critic's task. The only one which has caused or is likely to cause anything approaching a public fuss is the concluding volume of Lawrance Thompson's biography of Frost.[1] The fuss here was largely created by David Bromwich's surprisingly (since elsewhere he has been a good reviewer) simpleminded swallowing whole of, not Frost but Thompson-Frost—or what, since this final volume was completed after Thompson's death by his assistant R. H. Winnick, is a Frost twice or thrice removed. I have commented at length on the second volume of Thompson's biography (THE HUDSON REVIEW, Winter 1970–71) and so will not rehearse again my objections to the moralistic heavy-handedness with which he assesses Frost's faults as a "human being" at the same time as his paraphrases of Frost's ironic wit invariably ruin it, ironing the jokes out into banality. But Bromwich's review was notable for the naïveté (I presume it wasn't malice) with which he presumed that, after reading a biography he later admitted to be "without psychological subtlety or penetration," he was nevertheless able to see through to The True Frost. And so, eyes upraised and head shaking sadly, Bromwich announced that "a more hateful human being cannot have lived who wrote words that moved other human beings to tears."[2] No, he cannot have lived, except perhaps in the pages of Thompson's biography. Best to reread the collected poems, then Thompson's selection of letters, and make up your own.[3]

Of course it has not yet been determined just where each of our six moderns stands in relation to winning the most hateful or lovable human-being-sweepstakes: Pound was a fascist; Eliot a monarchist if not a misogynist; Stevens a heartless aesthete;[4] Yeats—you name it. No one ever called Thomas Hardy anything much worse than a pessimist (he himself preferred meliorist), and in writing about the last sixteen years of his life, Harold Orel need not occupy himself with refuting myths or combating pernicious received notions.[5] Probably wisely, Orel doesn't attempt a year-by-year account (they probably weren't all that different)

[1] ROBERT FROST: THE LATER YEARS, 1938–1963, by *Lawrance Thompson and R. H. Winnick*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $17.95.

[2] Bromwich, like others who know a lot about life, is strong on the phrase "human being." I was reminded that back in the late 1960's when college students kept insisting they wanted to be treated like Human Beings (instead of students, presumably) another colleague of mine suggested that they were really Human Beans.

[3] Frost's first biographer, Robert Newdick, died before he completed his task. The fragmented biography has just been published and there is enough of it to suggest that this intelligent and careful researcher did not find his subject to be a monster. William A. Sutton, ed., *Newdick's Season of Frost* (State University of New York Press, 1977), $20.00.

[4] Remember Stevens' immortal postscript in a letter of 1935: "The Italians have as much right to take Ethiopia from the coons as the coons had to take it from the boa-constrictors." A more recent story has Alfred Knopf visiting him on business in Hartford, then taking a picture of Stevens in front of his home, after which Knopf was not invited inside. One presumes he caught the next train back to N.Y.

[5] THE FINAL YEARS OF THOMAS HARDY, 1912–1928, by *Harold Orel*. University Press of Kansas. $14.00.

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but organizes his treatment topically, taking up Hardy's attitudes towards his deceased first wife (as expressed particularly through the "Poems of 1912–13") and towards such matters as Nature, History and War. There is an especially good chapter on Hardy as an "occasional" poet in which Orel convincingly shows that "the topical poems turn out, on closer examination not to be topical in their conception or their final appeal, and there is something vaguely reassuring about the spectacle of the poet evading categories . . ." There is also something reassuring about the critic not being over-solemn about his own categories. This is an attractively gotten-up book, wide in its knowledge and broadly sympathetic in its imagining of its subject.

It is a shock to move from the personal fullness and weight of the poems Hardy wrote at the beginning of this century's second decade, to the sorts of things Ezra Pound was turning out.[6] We now have available all of these early poems, not just the ones Pound selected to make up his *Personae* in 1926. As expected, the jacket pitch is that "even the discarded works of a great poet are of interest and value to students and devotees"; yet after reading (rather rapidly at some moments) through the collection I was only mildly moved to agreement. Surely it is pleasant to have the reproduced title pages of individual volumes—from *A Lume Spento* (1908) through *Ripostes* (1912)—and the editor has provided much admirable bibliographic information. But I'm not sure I learned any more about Pound than I knew before, except to have had reinforced his fin de siècle affiliations with poetry as the dream of a dream. Here are two four-line patches from poems new to me:

> Blazes of color intermingled,
> Wondrous pattern leading nowhere,
> Music without a name,
> Knights that ride in a dream,

And

> Neath the shadows of thy weaving
> Dreams that need no undeceiving,
> Loves that longer hold me not,
> Dreams I dream not any more.

The first is from "Swinburne: A Critique"; the second from "Nicotine," subtitled "A hymn to the dope." Eliot once said that reading lots of Swinburne was like repeated doses of gin and water. After reading these early Pound poems one feels sufficiently doped, so is relieved to see him taking to heart what Frost had decided (by 1913) about Tennysonian-Swinburnian "assonation"—that "they were on the wrong track or at any rate on a short track. They went the limits of it." One is also reminded

[6] COLLECTED EARLY POEMS OF EZRA POUND, ed. *Michael King*. New Directions. $22.50.

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how much finer the early Pound anthology favorites "Portrait d'une Femme" and "The Return" are to the general run of poems which surround them in this collection.

No one who has read with attention the early section of Wallace Stevens' letters, edited ten years ago by his daughter, is going to be much surprised by anything in the now published journals;[7] especially since Holly Stevens included the best bits from those journals to pad out the rather thin number of available early Stevens letters. Again we are amused by the young fellow's version of the American Sublime: "This morning it is cloudy though not gloomy. I ate a grapefruit in my room & then went down to the corner and had my boots blacked. In this way, I nurse an aristocratic feeling." Or we notice his penchant for teasing the yokels from out of town when he takes a suburban-country walk and stops at various taverns for "a beer, a cigar, and a poke at the bartenders," asks about the likes of "Mike Angelo, Butch Petrarch, Sammy Dante," and passes along the news "that John Keats had been run over by a trolley car at Stony Creek in the morning" to which the barman replied that he didn't know Keats but had heard of the family. Moments like these are highly satisfying, as are even more so the wonderful descriptions of Stevens' heroic Sunday Morning walks: of setting out up Fifth Avenue after a 4 a.m. breakfast of sausage and buckwheats until forty-two miles later he stops just short of West Point; or of an August ramble from Hackensack to Ridgewood to Hokokus to Paterson.

I found a good deal less satisfying Holly Stevens' well-intentioned but somewhat lugubrious interpolations in which we are nudged to think about this or that poem: "The same image recurs thirty years later, in 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' "; or a comment of her father's on approaching Tennessee—"green, hilly, sun-clouded place"—is predictably wondered about: "Was it then that Stevens first conceived . . . [Anecdote of the Jar"] Who cares? One reads along in these journals not to find "parallels" with the poems (and I would just as soon *not* think of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" anyway) but for reflections like this: "Somehow, in this season, I like to get my pipe going well, and meditate on suicide. It is such splendid melancholy, and, mixed with a little beer and whiskey—divine. If only one could look in at the window when they found one's body—one's blood and brains all over the pillow. How terrible the simple books would look,—and the chairs and the curtains so carefully drawn." There are pleasures and strangenesses to be found in Stevens' prose that simply never got into the poetry.

Both Richard Ellmann and Joseph Hone have written capable biographies of Yeats, yet the new one by Frank Tuohy, himself a novelist of some skill, held my attention throughout in ways the earlier ones failed to.[8] Perhaps it can be laid to the illustrations, done so handsomely and often with such beautiful color that I am ready to arise and go now to the Sligo coast, taking up residence somewhere under bare Ben Bulben's back. As

[7] SOUVENIRS AND PROPHECIES: THE YOUNG WALLACE STEVENS, by *Holly Stevens*. Alfred A. Knopf. $12.50.

[8] YEATS, by *Frank Tuohy*. Macmillan. $17.95.

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seen in his own fiction, Frank Tuohy possesses the comic sense; his account of Yeats is never reverent, and clearly delights in or is sardonically amused by him as a maker of impossible remarks, as to the lady who asked the poet whether he had read Bertrand Russell and received the answer "I could no more read Russell than I could make love to a bald-headed woman." Now that is a remark to ponder. Tuohy is a master of the parenthetical, writes his sentences in forcefully economical ways, as in speaking of Yeats's 1903–04 American tour and refuting the notion of Yeats-the-impractical-dreamer: "He made the entire western part of the tour alone, always punctual, never missing trains, and eager to give his best in the most casual conversation," then returning home "with over three thousand dollars in his pocket." When Tuohy does comment on a particular poem it is invariably to the point. Nothing much new here, as far as I can see, but an ideal way to survey with style and accuracy an engaging life.

But by far the most original and valuable book of this lot is Lyndall Gordon's portrait of Eliot's life through the years up to and including his conversion.[9] In six authoritatively written and thoroughly worked-out chapters she follows Eliot from youth to Harvard student to suffering young poet and husband to composer of *The Waste Land* to religious initiate, telling a story which is I think not likely to be ignored or refuted by future biographers. She has most notably made good use of the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library as well as the one at Harvard's Houghton Library, and her richly researched sources always illuminate rather then clutter the subject. Gordon sees Eliot as, in his early years as a poet, burdened—or gifted—with "a sense of prophetic power he could not quite grasp or express," until with rather terrifying appropriateness he married exactly the woman who brought it all out of him—"Why then Ile fit you." The exact relation of Vivienne Eliot's depressive drug-taking neurasthenia to her husband's own sexual inhibitions (which came first?) probably cannot be defined, and perhaps need not or should not be. But, as Eliot was to say about Coleridge years later, "Sometimes to be a 'ruined' man is itself a vocation." "It is terrible to be alone with another person" he wrote in a later-excised line from *The Waste Land* section once titled "In the Cage." Toiling away at Lloyd's bank, no doubt expecting trouble at home after work, his head filled with sonorous music from English and other poems ("After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now") he made the most of it all.

One of Lyndall Gordon's most interesting ideas is that Pound's cutting of *The Waste Land* was done at the expense of the "speculative" in favor of the "cultural-statement" aspect of the poem; that to some degree Pound blocked Eliot's attempt "to exhibit the whole truth—the strength as well as the sickness of a suffering soul"; and she notes a recrudescence of Eliot's

[9] ELIOT'S EARLY YEARS, by *Lyndall Gordon*. Oxford. $8.95. Since writing this I note that the book has been savaged by one English reviewer for its psychoanalytic presumptuousness and the inaccuracy with which Gordon sometimes translates poems into her own explanatory language. The latter charge is a just one; but I don't think it seriously damages the sensitivity and overall truth of the progress she charts: what years ago Kenneth Burke identified as Eliot's journey from St. Louis Tom to St. Thomas à Becket.

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depression after Pound's revision of the manuscript. About his eventual conversion to Anglo-Catholicism she has this to say:

> Eliot passed his youth walled-in by shyness and vast ambition. His adult life may be seen as a series of adventures from the citadel of his self in search of some great defining experience. He made expeditions across a perilous gap that divided him from the great world, and ventured into society, into marriage, into religious communion. He tried to maintain the polite, even curiosity of an explorer far from home, but each time had to withdraw—then labour to record, as precisely as possible, his strange encounters.

After reading this book I think I understand better what it means to say that T. S. Eliot was "self-centered," and how the major poems—"Prufrock," "Gerontion," *The Waste Land, Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets* must be read as acts of imaginative venture, even as "We think of the key, each in his prison/Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison."

A name that does not figure in Lyndall Gordon's book is the mythical Jean Verdenal to whom Eliot dedicated his first (*Prufrock*) volume. But he more than makes up for his absence there by his starring role in a recent book concerned with reading *The Waste Land* as the utterance of a poet tortured by the memory of his love for a dead male friend and now immersed in a sexually and humanly disastrous marriage.[10] James Miller's argument, like the John Peter essay of twenty-five years ago from which it admittedly developed, is never crude nor gleeful in its setting out to find the true key to *The Waste Land*. But even though Miller insists he is only using the life to illuminate the work, that he's not really interested in "What actually happened, if anything" between Eliot and Verdenal, it's still true that we're being constantly encouraged to think about Jean Verdenal or his absence, therefore feel more deeply about the poem which, at least in part, may have sprung from that absence.

Miller wants us to stop making *The Waste Land* "mean"—in the ingenious, over-intellectualized, culturally significant ways critics have been practicing, and instead start letting it "be" by letting ourselves be more emotionally accessible to "the private feelings below the level of consciousness." Yet it occurs to me that his own procedure, for all its insistence on how much he cares about the poem, rather strikingly neglects the poetry, in his eagerness to interpret and justify the sexual dimension he finds central to it. No doubt *The Waste Land* is an agonized, a painful utterance; but it is also most patently a playful, ultra-clever one; and it's difficult both to argue a thesis, make all your points come out right, and be as openly responsive to matters of rhythm, manner or voice as the hypothetical intelligent reader must be. But, as Eliot himself reminded us, that intelligent reader doesn't exist. No wonder we have to keep trying to invent him.

[10] T. S. ELIOT'S PERSONAL WASTE LAND, by *James E. Miller Jr.* Pennsylvania State University Press. $12.95.

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RICHARD PEVEAR

Poetry Chronicle

THE MOST IMPORTANT NEW BOOKS OF POETRY ARE, I find, all translations.[1] And they are all from languages that I cannot read. Which puts me in a rather contradictory position. The translations themselves are not pioneering or style-forming work like Marlowe's Ovid or Pound's Propertius, and they don't pretend to be. They are also not free renderings by poets who cannot read the originals (a genre I find particularly confusing). They might best be seen as accounts in English of poetic work that exists somewhere else. Like photographs of foreign landscapes: you can't breathe the air or walk around in them, but you can see something of what is there. And if the photographer is a good one, he will have picked out the most telling qualities of the place and composed his picture well. With these four books, for various reasons, I believe the accounts are trustworthy and present at least the lineaments of the poet, though the essential qualities of the work are beyond their reach.

My position is doubly contradictory, however, because I also have some fears about the effect that translations are having on our own poetry and the presumptions they lead to. There is a difference between breadth and omnivorousness. The one is guided by curiosity and judgment, the other by a kind of indiscriminate gluttony. Breadth comes from inner need and extends back through time, omnivorousness feeds passively on the bulk that is put under its nose. Our literary culture, if that is what it is, has all the characteristics of omnivorousness. Poet-translators have ransacked the world's stores of poetry and offered us a seemingly endless stream of books in which work of the most varied traditions and styles all comes out sounding the same. Marlowe or Pound may have perfected their style through the practice of translation, but that does not establish a law. It depends on the demands the poet makes on himself. No one else's Propertius sounds like Pound's. What lies behind the uniformity of these "poetic" translations is the uniformity of the contemporary poetic manner. There are many poets writing today whose English sounds like a rather loose translation of some probably interesting original. Instead of having an invigorating effect, in other words, poetic translations seem to open the way for a leveling of the sense of poetic speech and form, the perfecting of a kind of code-language that lacks the dimensions of a living voice and the formal impulse of poetry.

[1] NUA-BHARDACHD GHAIDHLIG/MODERN SCOTTISH GAELIC POEMS, (bilingual), edited by *Donald MacAuley*. New Directions. $15.75. ANNA AKHMATOVA, A POETIC PILGRIMAGE, by *Amanda Haight*. Oxford. $10.00. THE FOURTH DIMENSION, SELECTED POEMS OF YANNIS RITSOS, translated by *Rae Dalven*. Godine. $12.50. MEDITERRANEAN POEMS, by *Aleksander Wat*, translated by *Czeslaw Milosz*. Ardis. $2.95.

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But the real cause may lie elsewhere: in the sudden, massive increase in the teaching of verse composition. The arguments in favor of this practice all have to do with the well-being of the poet, not of poetry. The institutionalized poetry-network that has sprung up over the past two decades is a poor parody of a cultural life, and a rather shameful one. The writing of poetry cannot be taught. The result has been, I think, that writing teachers have had to invent another kind of writing that looks like poetry, and that can be taught. Which reminds me of something Machado's Juan de Mairena wrote:

> How can a teacher, or, if you wish, a pedagogue, teach, educate, guide a child without making himself something of a child in his turn and without professing after all a somewhat infantilized knowledge? For it is the child, in part, who makes the teacher. And it is infantilized knowledge and the infantile conduct of knowing that constitute the most elemental aspects of pedantry, as seems to be indicated by the Greek etymology of the word.

That, I tell myself, explains at least something of what's happening in the "field" of poetry these days. In the end, the effect on real poetry may be negligible, though it demands a kind of saintliness from the poet. If we are concerned with the world and do not want to withdraw from it, the social and economic causes behind the infantilization of our culture ought to be brought to light. But the whole question is a tar-baby, and I don't want to touch it now.

In the meantime, there are all these books. A vast amount of generally competent, professional-seeming verse is being written. Even first books seem to have a polished, definitive quality about them. Heather McHugh's *Dangers*[2] is an example. Her poem "In Praise of Pain" ends:

> The brightness drawn and quartered on a sheet,
> the moment cracked upon a bed, will last
> as if you soldered them with moon and flux.
> And break the bottle of the eye to see
> what lights are spun of accident and glass.

Firm rhythms, a sense of precision and particularity, some witty plays on words—altogether a competent job of writing. And her book does not vary from that standard. She's got it together. But I have only a vague sense that the words mean something. Perhaps if I go back to the beginning of the poem:

> A brilliance takes up residence in flaws
> that all the unchipped faces of design
> refuse. The wine collects its starlets
> at a lip's fault, sunlight where the nicked

[2] DANGERS, by *Heather McHugh*. Houghton-Mifflin. $4.50.

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glass angles, and affection where the eye
is least correctable, where arrows of
unquivered light are lodged, where someone
else's eyes have come to be concerned.

But all I see is a rather precious writing-up of a commonplace idea. The surface is meant to be impressive. The words are depthless. The writing has crystallized too quickly into a manner. Behind that I sense a striving, but for the wrong thing: not for poetry, but for the publishable poem.

Olga Broumas's first book, *Beginning with O,*[3] is not so superficial in manner and its content is more profoundly felt. Her free verse rhythms are supple and artfully handled. It begins with a sequence of twelve poems with Greek or mythological titles. Again there is the sense of a precise language:

Let's not have tea. White wine
eases the mind along
the slopes
of the faithful body, helps

any memory once engraved
on the twin
chromosome ribbons, emerge, tentative
from the archaeology of an excised past.
("Artemis")

There are both mythical and present-day intimations in the poem, but neither are more than sketchily presented. Even in her spare lines, surface wins out over meaning, poetic diction over the fullness of experience. Her poem, "the knife & the bread," is dedicated "to the women of Cyprus, '74," and represents an impulse to move out to larger concerns than the worldless solipsism that is common to so much contemporary verse. Yet the implications of her theme (male violence and the suffering of women) are only barely suggested in the poem, and the minimal words are still largely rhetorical:

i tell you violence
perseveres, the light being cruel
itself
to the beveled edges
i look, i cannot forget
though i flap my mind like a breathless tongue.

What are the "beveled edges"? What is a "breathless tongue"? Why is the light cruel? What does it mean that "violence perseveres"? If a theme is important, it's important to deal with it fully and passionately, in all its

[3] BEGINNING WITH O. by *Olga Broumas*. Yale University Press. $2.95.

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human complexity, and not simply to turn it into a piece of writing. Broumas' language intends to be tough and impressive; it is aware, that is to say, of the impression it wants to make. That is the nature of rhetoric, not of poetic speech.

Stanley Plumley's fourth book, *Out of the Body Travel,*[4] is a chastely written, nicely turned-out album of family photos—with, behind it, that feeling of the pathetic, the small, the lost, the unmentionable emptiness of American life:

> All of the faces floated in the dead air of pictures . . .

as he says in "Brothers & Sisters." It gets more and more sentimental as it goes on, but sentimentality is really the core of this poetic convention which has become a staple of contemporary verse:

> We lived in a block house. It is five a.m.
> I'm here, you're here with first light, coffee, and
> the rain.
>
> ("Ghazal/Insomnia")

You can't condemn someone's private experience, or the sentiment that goes with it. As matter for poetry, I find it questionable. Behind the air of precision and candor in all three of these books, there is a great vagueness. But I think that is not so much the fault of these writers as of the general mentality of our literary culture, its narrowness and specialization, its institutionalization, its inherent submissiveness, and of a critical attitude that comes down to saying something like, "Hey, man, don't mess up my act!"

So I admit that it is partly for polemical reasons that I've chosen to concentrate on the translations I mentioned at the start. They are accounts not only of poetry that does exist somewhere else but of the poets' lives. Their lives have some striking similarities. They all show how little poetry has to do with submission, with the machinery of publication, with patronage and sinecures, and how much it has to do with love of tradition, free dedication, belief in the importance of the work itself. Ritsos expresses these things in a beautiful sequence of poems to Cavafy:

> He said: "Form is neither invented nor imposed;
> it is contained in its content and is sometimes revealed
> in its movement to a going out." "Platitudes," we said,
> "vague words—what revelations now?" He said nothing more;
> he cupped his chin in his two hands like a word
> inside quotation marks.
>
> ("Concerning Form")

The Gaelic poet Sorley Maclean has written lyrics in homage to his eighteenth-century predecessor Uilleam Ros, though his own work is far

[4] OUT OF THE BODY TRAVEL, by *Stanley Plumly*. Ecco Press. $6.95.

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from being a pious imitation of old models—he is, in fact, the major innovator in modern Gaelic poetry. Akhmatova, during her hardest years, devoted herself to the study of Pushkin and wrote a series of remarkable essays on his work. And Aleksander Wat's poetry, for all its whimsy, irony and irreverence, is the work of a deeply cultivated and curious mind. The past nourished these poets in original ways and has given their work a sense of inner spaciousness and living continuity.

They also were all deeply involved in the historical events of their time and the struggles of their people, either actively or through common suffering. Wat, for example, started out in the twenties as a futurist ("rather dadaist," according to Czeslaw Milosz) and a "zealous Leftist." He was imprisoned by the Polish authorities in 1932, and again by Soviet authorities in 1940 and in 1944—first on charges of Trotsykism, Zionism, and of working for the Vatican, then for refusing to side with the proto-Polish Communist government in Russia or acquire Soviet citizenship. Back in Poland in the late forties, he published essays and poetry, but was persecuted by the Stalinists (1949–56) and suffered a stroke from which, Milosz says, he never fully recovered. In the last decade of his life (he died in 1967), he was able to travel, and "lived mostly in the south of France or in Italy, both because of the state of his health and his appraisal of the situation in Poland." It was during that decade that he wrote most of the poems in this little collection.

The trials of Akhmatova's life are well-known, and so is the integrity with which she faced them. They are treated in detail in Amanda Haight's book. The book also contains the most readable translation I've seen of the "Requiem" Akhmatova wrote for all the people who suffered through Stalin's terror:

> Because even in blessed death I'm afraid
> I'll forget the noise the Black Marias made
>
> And the ugly way the door slammed shut
> And the old woman's howl like a beast that was hurt.
>
> And from my motionless bronze lids
> May the thawing snow stream down like tears
>
> And the prison dove coo from afar
> And the boats go quietly down the Neva.

In fact, it is less a critical study than an anthology with extended commentaries. The choice of poems covers all periods of Akhmatova's work, including the "silent years." The biographical and thematic commentaries are detailed but summary, not on the level of certain early essays on Akhamatova, such as Nedobrovo's, but they give a fuller sense of the work and of Akhmatova's mind than could be given by translations alone. What strikes me about Akhmatova's poetry, even from the first,

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most personal period, is how deeply it is imbued with elements of Russian folk culture, which make it something far different from the "salon poetry" of private experience that Zhdanov and others accused her of writing. Even dealing with her own fate as a poet, in "The Way of all Earth" (written in the late thirties), she projects herself into the figure of "the woman of Kitezh"—Kitezh, the legendary city which, Amanda Haight notes, "was saved by prayer from the advance of the Tatars:"

> But I do not listen to the groan
> Of the hoarse hurdy-gurdy.
> That is not the sound
> The woman of Kitezh hears.

It was not only that she understood her fate as more than a private fate but that she found the means within her own culture for expressing it in emblematic, penetrating, collective images. As remarkable as her stubborn refusal to adapt to the conditions of Soviet literary life is the poetry she wrote during the war years, "permeated," as Andrei Sinyavsky has said, "with the consciousness of patriotic duty and personal and communal responsibility for the fate of the motherland." But that too goes back to poems written as early as 1917. Though the events of her time forced her into long periods of isolation and obscurity and her books were repeatedly banned, she could still say that if she had been offered another choice, in some other place:

> And if from there I had looked back sometime
> And seen my life now as it is today
> I would at last have known what envy means . . . .

Sorley Maclean, George Campbell Hay, and the other three poets in *Modern Scottish Gaelic Poetry* have made a historical choice, and a commitment to their people, simply by writing in Gaelic. Maclean, I believe, is one of the greatest poets of our time. I say that not knowing a word of Gaelic, simply on the basis of his own English versions of his poems. The selection of his work in this book is neither as full nor as representative as the selection in a now out of print book called *Four Points of a Saltire* which was published in Edinburgh several years ago or the selection that appeared in a special issue of *Lines Review* (No. 34, September 1970) devoted to Maclean's work. But it is good enough. The power and richness of his work are all the more surprising in that it has been written in the face of the likely death of Gaelic culture. Maclean knows what forces threaten it and how precarious its life is. His early love poetry grew out of the conflict he felt between his love for a woman and his commitment to radical politics. In one song, he asks the woman:

> Would white body and forehead's sun
> take from me the foul black treachery,
> spite of the bourgeois and poison of their creed
> and the feebleness of our dismal Scotland?
> . . . . . .

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What is every curl of your gold-yellow head
to all the poverty, anguish and grief
that will come and have come on Europe's people
from the Slave Ship to the slavery of the masses?
("The Cry of Europe")

But it is in long meditative poems ("The Heron," "The Woods of Raasay," "Hallaig"), which are unlike anything I've read in English or other languages, that his work reaches its fullest expression. It is impossible to represent them by quotation, because much of their quality is in their integral composition and movement. There is great range in his work, as there is in Akhmatova's, and his voice is as "unfettered" as hers.

Maclean writes only in Gaelic. George Campbell Hay, his contemporary in time and experience (Maclean was born in 1911, Hay in 1915), has also written poems in English and Scots. His Gaelic poems go from the purely lyrical to direct social statement. "Youth of my country," he writes in "The Duty of the Heights":

Let your step be on the summit,
and your breast exposed to the sky.
For you the tearing wind of the pinnacles,
lest destruction come on us in a landslide.

Such directness is almost embarrassing to our taste. It is a quality of poetry that we have largely dispensed with and assumes a kind of audience that we would be hard put to find. It is a quality that has also been dispensed with, not quite so largely, by the other poets in this anthology, who belong, as Donald MacAuley tells us in his preface, "to an age of diminishing faith in plans, in both their communities," and whose work is more restrained in scope, more cautionary and ironic.

Yannis Ritsos' experiences of political persection and imprisonment are closely parallel to Wat's, though ideologically reversed. His first widely popular poem, *Epitaphios,* was confiscated by the Metaxas government and publicly burned in 1936. After active involvement in the Greek resistance/liberation movement from 1940 to 1948, he was arrested and deported to various prison islands. On Makronisos he wrote poems and buried them in bottles. Released in 1952, he enjoyed fifteen years of freedom. He was arrested again in 1967, at five o'clock in the morning on the day the military seized power. Deportation to Yiaros and then Leros, house arrest on Samos without the right to see visitors, restriction of movement, the ban on his books continued until the recent fall of the junta. Throughout his life, despite the arrests and his own poor health, Ritsos has been a prolific poet, and in the past two decades he has achieved world recognition. *The Fourth Dimension* is the first large selection of his work to appear in English. Rae Dalven has chosen to omit his most famous political poems, the *Epitaphios* and *Romiosini* (1945–47), which means that the book is somewhat toned down. She has included, along with a generous selection of short poems and the complete sequence of

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Twelve Poems for Cavafy, five long poems, four of which are dramatic monologues and the most compelling things in the book.

Ritsos and Wat have more in common than their knowledge of prisons. There is a similarity of vision and poetic method in their work. Their poems are suspensions of metaphor, gesture, detached observation, and have a strange combination of violence and passivity, and a reticence or obliqueness that makes a telling contrast to the penetrating directness of Maclean or Akhamatova. They are what might still be called "experimental" or "modernist" poets. But it is the experience behind their work that both dictates and justifies the method.

Ritsos' work seems to vary little from the first brief poems in this book to the latest. There is no conventional lyric emotion in them. They are constructed out of discrete materials, non sequiturs, objects, gestures, extreme metaphors. He prefers to use a passive or collective voice, the third person or the first person plural. His speakers are often women (that is true of three of the four monologues as well). The little poem called "Miracle" might be taken as a commentary on his work as well as an example of it:

> A man, before going to bed, put his watch under his pillow.
> Then he went to sleep. Outside the wind was blowing. You
> who know
> the miraculous continuity of little motions, understand.
> A man, his watch, the wind. Nothing else.

The poems at the end of the book, written on Leros in the winter of 1967–68, are equally understated, despite the circumstances under which they were written:

> These five clouds, almost identical, look familiar to us
> and somehow vaguely pleasant—most likely their number,
> most likely the awareness that we can still count
> or just observe. Later we noticed
> the nuances—a rose cloud dissolving in violet. Then
> the whistle was heard. We got up. They counted us
> one by one in front of the gate. We were smiling
> knowing full well that we had been left out
> of their count, with the five clouds and the new moon.
> ("Secret Independence")

Aleksander Wat's "Songs of a Wanderer" and "Dreams from the Shore of the Mediterranean" are sequences that bring together details of the poet's immediate surroundings and the experiences of his past, genre scenes and incantations, in a meditation on decay and mortality which, in its backhanded way, is also a praise of life. The poems are whimsical, ironic, detached in tone. The figures in them go through remarkable transformations. An old woman waiting in a doorway for her son to come home from work is first seen as an elemental force:

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It is not erosion which crumbles stone here.
But the jaws of an old woman, whom
I pass on the road. A patient old woman, her eyes like cinders
under a dark-brown straw hat . . . .

Then, after a consideration of the function of olive trees ("The Vengeful Hand set them here as an eternal threat/ above the mole and the bush, above the fretful ant/ above the young human/ species, which secretes the glue of labor . . ."), she appears again:

So it is not erosion. Not erosion.
The old woman on the domestic threshold,
bent in two, all in expectation of her son's return from work
(he has a job in Grasse,
at Grasset's perfume factory).
Smoke dear to one's nostrils,
sun-drenched window panes,
and you, my dear road—the vehicle
for a return home.
In lieblicher Bläue
die Fenster wie die Thore
der Schönheit . . . . Dichterisch
wohnet der Mensch auf dieser
Erde . . . . Cold Mother Earth. She waits
for her son's return.

It is all set to the rhythm of the poet's walking and musing: a series of interlocking ironies, the banal and the mythical, the close up of detail and the woman looming into "Cold Mother Earth" waiting for her son's "return"—the return from Grasse, the return to the earth that haunts Wat all through these poems.

The sixth "Song of a Wanderer" shows Stalin, Voroshilov and Kaganovitch deciding the fate of the imprisoned General Yakir (so Wat's note tells us):

Three good buddies, around a samovar with vodka and cucumbers.
Two in suspenders; one in socks, another in slippers,
and the third as if dressed for a ball: a tie, cheap pin
striped
trousers, a frock coat of heavy fabric, lacquered shoes

Let the majordomo rage
the lackey's looking grim
we've got you locked up in our cage
we'll tear you limb from limb

—they sing in chorus, the first even has a quite nice tenor.
They drink belch, look through
dossier after dossier, piles of dossiers.

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The little scene simply takes its place in the songs among natural images, reflections on the identity of Satan and the nature of the Good, Mister Fevrard and his Parisian girlfriend, the lady innkeeper and her dog Diane. It is the kind of reticent inclusiveness we find in Ritsos. What lies behind it is devastating experience. In her essay on Brecht, Hannah Arendt quotes a passage from Sartre that may explain the nature of that experience: "When the instruments are broken and unusable, when plans are blasted and effort is meaningless, the world appears with a childlike and terrible freshness, suspended trackless in a void." Wat and Ritsos both have that after-catastrophe freshness, which is enigmatic—that is, terrible and childlike. The experience behind their work is real, lived through. Their poetry has both a sense of wonder and of aftermath; an acute understanding of human fragility, and a restorative gift so tentative that it can barely show itself in the words, for reasons Ritsos describes in the poem called "Unfamiliar Instrument:"

> He no longer liked the things, the words, the birds that had become
> slogans or symbols (and practically nothing had escaped
> this destiny). Thus he preferred to keep his mouth shut,
> making, as mutes do, some strange gestures,
> serene, ambiguous, bitter, and somewhat amusing. But some
> years later these too were reduced to slogans.

Ritsos' vision is most fully elaborated in his monologues, particularly the two with legendary speakers: Elektra in "Beneath the Shadow of the Mountain" and Ismene in the poem of that name. In both he shows the women in old age, as two who have looked on tragic events from the side, who have seen many political upheavals and find them incomprehensible, who live in decaying houses, filled with disjointed memories, the last survivors of "large exterminated families." The suspension of the monologue is a perfect medium for the after-catastrophe vision. Ismene even seems to define its poetics:

> Memory
> is certainly a sort of refuge. But even this is exhausted,
> it needs new images, even random ones, even strange ones.
>
> I have selected this window. Leaning over here, half inside,
> half outside,
> I see, I remember. Nothing belongs to me. A large quietude,
> I'm starting again to observe the trees, the birds, the
> colors,
> for hunters' feet returning at twilight; I feel so free . . .

It is curious, perhaps, that a poet of Ritsos' political commitments should be drawn to such figures repeatedly. It is not entirely clear what his attitude towards them is. Despite the apparent subjectivity of his method, he is essentially a dramatic poet. Whereas Aleksander Wat is more inward, reflective, elegiac. But they have both been immersed in the life of our time and have written *in extremis*.

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ROBERT MC DOWELL

Eloquence on the Wane

THERE ARE TIMES IN A POET'S CAREER when he will look ridiculous. It often occurs when Fashion discards him in favor of a more charming footman; or it may happen when he tries something he hasn't done before. James Dickey, for the first time, has attempted a book-length poem. *The Zodiac*.[1] I won't say that he looks ridiculous, but I can abide the conservative assertion that he is certainly suspect. What is of particular interest is not that the poem is often bad, but that it raises the issue of the negative influences bad poets sometimes provide for their more talented peers. If there is any truth to the concept of the good poet led astray, *The Zodiac* might provide a timely example.

The poem is based on a work of the same title by Hendrik Marsman, a Dutch sailor who died in 1940 in the North Atlantic. In a brief introductory note, the author explains: "Its twelve sections are the story of a drunken and perhaps dying Dutch poet who returns to his home in Amsterdam . . . and tries desperately to relate himself, by means of stars, to the universe."

Thus, a familiar theme: Man struggling to comprehend and proclaim his spirituality. What Dickey offers the reader is a specimen—a grotesque specimen—who imagines himself a bartender for God, a poet whose task is to move the stars and create a new beast for the zodiac.

Though the idea has infinite possibilities, I'm afraid that Dickey settles for far too little in his treatment of it. His protagonist is perceived literally from the outside looking in. The reader does not feel what he feels or understand it on the level where understanding matters most. The poet has failed to *become* what he has written about. The character does not become anything, either. He is the same misanthrope in the first line as in the last one. There is no achievement, no salvation, no metamorphosis. This may be unimportant for some, but I expect in a poem—especially in a long poem—something more than the claustrophobic schema of a man who cannot be honest even when looking at himself.

The long poem gives a poet the opportunity to pull out all the stops. A compressed language, as in shorter poems, is essential; but compression of subject matter is disastrous. The poet must be able to shift gears, to change up on his tone and technique, to develop and manipulate plot complications without losing command of simplicity. Most important, he must be able to *think* and convince us that he has done so. Without this foundation, the long poem is destined to go the way of all boats stripped of their hulls.

Be it long poems or short, in recent years the results have been much the same. Great subjects have been hard to come by. It seems that if we can't

[1] THE ZODIAC, by *James Dickey*. Doubleday. $6.00.

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write about sexual exploits or what happened on the way to the laundromat we suffer creative menopause or worse—the modern poetic hero. He is the poolhall tough with slicked-back hair who lisps all his days, the yokel who believes in small things and so stares longingly at his toes, the born loser who is no good to anybody, has nowhere to go and goes there. In *The Zodiac,* a travelogue featuring the streets of Amsterdam, he is the focal point, a dolt who babbles through delirium tremens. Many contemporary poets—Ginsberg and Bly come immediately to mind—relish this prototype. It is disturbing that Dickey, so often a superior poet in books such as *Drowning With Others* and *Buckdancer's Choice,* should begin to see it their way, should succumb to the popular notion that evidence in a poem of one's intelligence is a shameful thing.

As for Dickey's inclination to fall from grace, we could have seen it coming. In an introduction to *Young American Poets,* an anthology published in 1968, he declared: "The aging process almost always brings to the poet the secret conviction that he has settled for far too little, that he has paid too much attention to . . . literary tradition and the past. The nearer he gets to his end the more he yearns for the cave; for a wild, shaggy, all-out, all-involving way of speaking where language and he engage each other at primitive levels . . . All his lifelong struggle with "craft" seems a tragic and ludicrous waste of time; and he looks on the productions of the whole history of literature—indeed, of all human communication and expression—as so much self-indulgent and irrelevant chatter . . ." These were not novel sentiments nine years ago, nor do they seem more genuine today. I could not, before reading *The Zodiac,* believe that Dickey himself believed them.

If American poetry serves a useful purpose today, it is to engender distrust of these doctrines of bombast and banality and their soap-box-straddling, boorish Gurus into whose ranks James Dickey, on the strength of *The Zodiac,* apparently clamors for admission. He needn't raise a fuss. If the poem is any indication, his position among them is patently secure.

It is felt by many that Dickey has always thrived on rhetoric, that he is the classic loudmouth, the chronic stormtrooper. I disagree, but allow that there is truth in the supposition that, in his selection and treatment of subjects, Dickey is often an incongruous poet. *The Zodiac* reveals him at his *most* incongruous.

He moves among stars.

Sure. We all do, but he is star-*crazed,*
mad

With Einfuhling, with connecting and joining things that
lay their meanings

Over billions of light years

eons of time—Ah,

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Years of light: billions of them:
they are pictures

Of some sort of meaning.

This is embarrassing at best. The reader tries in vain to envision Homer the Drunkard, or Goethe the Pederast. The image of John Clare is equally evasive.

Dickey's poetic personae are at their best when brooding against a country backdrop. "The Lifeguard" and "The Sheep Child" provide excellent examples. But he cannot fuse the madhouse and the forest primeval as well as Roethke did. If a poet can't, he probably shouldn't go so far as to publish his efforts. Dickey does:

Look, you son of a bitch, I know what peace is,
He says to his morning drink. Peace, PEACE, you asshole . . .
Look at me, mirror. My *eyes* are full of it, of the pale blue fumes
Of Mediterranean distance. Isn't that *enough?*

No, it isn't. Dickey's familiar technical eccentricities—the use of capital letters, italicized words, the spacing and line breaks—have never mocked his purpose more than here. The use of profanity is strained; I wonder if he could be so confused as to fall into the rut of equating eloquence with a dearth of ideas. Vulgarity comes either from an uncultured sensibility or from the frustration of not being able to express a particular thought. We know that Dickey's work does not fall into the former category . . . In addition, the cadences do not sing. All of the lines limp to the same tune. The language is so often abrasive that it would mystify anybody unwilling to grant the poet immunity from the question: "Why did you *do* that?"

It is a credit to Dickey that, in spite of so many serious problems, there are brief passages which live up to his capabilities.

The fish, too,
Are afraid of the sun
Under the half-stacked greens of the rotten bridge
And light falls with the ultimate marigold horror . . .

Nobody writing today could better describe a natural setting. Who else could out-dazzle "the half-stacked greens of the rotten bridge," or be able to tell us of the sun which "falls with the ultimate marigold horror"? But such passages are never sustained beyond half a page. When he writes:

The garden, he thinks, was here,
Bald a few sparse elephant-head hairs,

Where as a kid he'd ambled grumbling like a ghost
In tulip shadow,
The light humid cool

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Of the family maze.

The garden where he hid the body—
His own—somewhere under the grape-roof—well,

Let him cry, and wipe his face on dead leaves . . .

we applaud. But when he continues,

Over the little bitch who filled, with *his* hand,
His diary with dreadful verses . . .

we can only blush for him and return to mulling over our Baedecker.

The poetry Guru's stock response to such criticism is a smirking, ominous silence having much in common with a Scientologist's attitude toward the uninitiated. Unfortunately for them, attitudinizing won't get poems written. There is in Welsh mythology the legend of the Chair of Idris. Whoever spent the night in it was found the next morning either dead, mad or a poet. Contemporary pretenders fit cozily into the first two categories. There they sit, round-bellied and self-satisfied. I wish James Dickey would leave them behind and set his sights on poetry again. *The Zodiac* contains lines which suggest that, deep down, Dickey has an inkling that this is essential:

No words
But the ones anybody'd use: the ones from humanity's garbage-can
Of language.
A poet has got to do better . . .

Ipse dixit.

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VERNON YOUNG

Disenchanted Fictions

> The use of the double, and its effect on the individual consciousness, in James's fictions, can be rewardingly compared with what has become the most common contemporary narrative of the double, the technological or science-fiction form. A rather well-written and representative example is James Blish's *Spock Must Die!* (1970), an incident or adventure inside the continuing, televised saga of *Star Trek*. . . . In an effort to place an emissary on the planet Organia, the engineers of the *Enterprise* translate Spock, the brilliant Vulcanian-human second officer, into a beam of tachyons, while at the same time keeping him, the original, undisturbed. Unfortunately, Organia has been *sealed off by an enclosing thought-shield, placed by the* Klingon enemy, that acts as a mirror to the tachyon beam, and the second Spock is instantly . . .[1]

ANYONE WHO REALLY WANTS TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENS, instantly, to the second Spock, brilliant Vulcanian-human, should not be reading this review! Joseph Epstein has taken the appropriate words out of my mouth; in passing reference to a novel by Kurt Vonnegut (THE HUDSON REVIEW, Winter 1976–77), Mr. Epstein declared, with salutary confidence, "To summarize a work of science fiction of which one does not think well is to squeeze the trigger." From me, a minimum of trigger-squeezing will be forthcoming; there is no work of science-fiction of which I think well.

Readers who share my general aversion, or my specific indifference to the fate of the hero mini-synopsized above, may yet justifiably wonder what the devil Henry James was doing in that galley. Having read (and reread, with barely diminishing incredulity) Strother Purdy's "provocative book"—I quote, of course, from its jacket—with its argument "for criticism that accepts the natural kinship between science and literature," I remain doubtful of my competence to explain satisfactorily the presence in it of Henry James or the evidence for accepting any "natural kinship" between science and literature. (Between, that is to say, science and *fiction*, a category of literature.) Fiction that contains the data of the sciences or employs assumptions provided by one or another field of science is not thereby *akin* to science. Arguments for reconciling art with science have been going on since Plato, although Purdy seems to think they began with C. P. Snow. I thought it had been established that there is no intrinsic opposition because art and science are two forever separate systems of symbol language, with quite unrelated aims.[2] Purdy will have us believe

[1] THE HOLE IN THE FABRIC: SCIENCE, CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND HENRY JAMES, by *Strother B. Purdy*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $11.95.

[2] Matt Walton, a scientist, has sensibly formulated the distinction. "We are inescapably concerned with two genuinely different ways of grasping reality, poetically as a function of human response, scientifically as something independent and subsuming the human response." Quoted in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics*, p. 752, column 2 of "Science & Poetry."

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that two modes of apprehending "reality" are now being fused in a subcategory of fiction—namely, the hybrid, science-fiction; that's as accurately as I can convey the banality of his main premise. (Actually his book consists of related—which is not to say integrated—essays, and the science-fiction aspect has little bearing, though he tries to urge it, on his collateral subjects: the murder mystery, the Erotic, the Feminine Principle and the ambience of Nothingness.)

An Associate Professor of English Literature who has no love for literature which has not been disembowelled, Strother Purdy is a familiar and sinister presence in the modern scene. Overimpressed, not to say staggered by, the radically changing concepts of physical science, Purdy has decided that all literature which is not, in its own terms, *au courant* with the post-Einsteinian model of the universe he thinks we "live in," is hopelessly irrelevant to our authentic fate. Such literature includes the ci-devant "moderns," Proust, Joyce, Eliot, Mann and Virginia Woolf. Among these shades of the past he is reluctant to include Kafka, evidently because K's world is one, which, since there is in it no substantial society, no time, no geographical space, to speak of, no characters of fully human dimension, is therefore acceptable in the New Vacuum of thought and motive requisite for our condition, did we but recognize it, as Purdy does. His method throughout is to set up a quotation in order to dispute it, while retaining sufficient confidence in it to support his own fickle convictions. On one page he quotes Jacques Monod—man must awaken to his "total solitude, his fundamental isolation" (i.e. in the universe); on another he advances the opinion of a *Scientific American* pundit: "It seems increasingly likely that we are not alone in the universe. There may be millions of inhabited planets like our own." (So one can't be lonely among millions?) Something might have been noted here of the divergent cultural bias of a French and an American scientist but Purdy is aloof from such nuances. Conspicuously, in his discourse, he alternatively deplores the advance of technology while defending space exploration. Laboring to accommodate both the humanist establishment and his sci-fi colleagues, he quotes a freakout named Bruce Montgomery who sneers at "the monotonously humanist bias of the last five centuries of our culture" and complains that mainstream fiction finds "greater interest and significance in the imagined adulteries of one out of 2,700,000,000 nonentities than in the death of a galaxy." Purdy pretends pique: "the agony of Anna Karenina is a pitifully small thing on the galactic scale but to us other pitifully small things it is an intensely moving experience to share." However, Purdy's version of the uselessness of the past is equally sweeping.

> . . . while we give formal acknowledgment to the idea that our great writers—Milton, Shakespeare, Homer, Cervantes, Tolstoy—are always "alive" to us . . . we are in fact, in our own minds and in the minds of our students [sic] undergoing a historical phase of such change, physical change in our world brought about by the relentless and destructive advance of science and technology into areas we thought most secure

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> and unalterable, that we are having very great difficulty in managing any communication at all with the past, specifically in this context the literary past, without excluding from our minds the present and the imagined future. . . .

What does this graceless circumlocution say when decocted? That areas of learning and morality have become insecure and radically alterable because the physical dimensions of the universe have been reread by mathematicians who are incomprehensible to most of us; that Strother Purdy has the same kind of mind, the same rage for vacancy, as the contemporary novelists he most admires, among them Kurt Vonnegut who has one of his characters assert that "Man is vile, and makes nothing worth making, knows nothing worth knowing." (Nothing. Who wanted the wheel or T'ang and Ming, Socrates, Rheims, Leonardo or Schubert's *D Major Sonata* ?) On the subject of Thomas Pynchon (an honorary member of Purdy's club), Robert Alter has precisely defined the consequences of such intellectual nihilism.[3]

> If history is no longer a realm of concatenation, if there are no necessary connections between separate events . . . any associative chain of fantasies, any crotchety hobbyistic interest, any technical fascination with the rendering of odd trivia, can be pursued by the novelist as legitimately as the movement of supposedly "significant" actions. The end of history, in other words, is a writer's license for self-indulgence. . . ."

Mr. Purdy eagerly confirms Mr. Alter's inference.

> Given an uncontrollable universe, possibly directed by forces inimical to man. . . . what point is there in celebrating what man can think and do? . . . Man the image of his Maker, apex of creation, becomes a bad joke: the form of his creator may be nothingness; the only ability with which he can show himself superior to the animal and plant forms . . . is that of self-destruction. . . . What seems attractive for literary use is any form of consciousness that is not the normal consciousness of mankind and gives a point of view of strangeness suitable to the new strangeness of the world.

(Trusting the intelligence of my readers further than Mr. Purdy would permit, I leave to them the simple task of detecting the numerous solecisms of logic in this incredible paragraph.) It follows—at least in Purdy's books—that a form of viable literary expression remains, even in our uninhabitable void:

> . . . while science fiction has been given literary value by the fact that writers of major talent are taking it up [Nabokov is the only "major"

[3] Robert Alter, "History and the New American Novel," *Dialogue* (USIA), 9–1, 1976.

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> contemporary writer he at length cites] it has also been lent importance from a greater source: The expropriation of the "scenarios" or projections of reality by conventional fiction, thanks to the change in reality, leaves science fiction, for all its defects, the alternative and inheriting scenario source. . . ."

All the same, one suspects that Professor Purdy, as an English Department member, nervously felt the need to confer final respectability upon his adventures with cryptograms, Nabokov's *Ada* and the supersonic culture of tomorrow. To this end he enlisted Henry James, happily an American with just a touch of the defector to give him the New Look. But James presented the embarrassing problem of the thick social density in literature which Purdy had dismissed as cultural lag, of no present or future utility. Thus the James he did enlist must be shorn of all the accretions by which he is customarily identified: the social density had to go, and with it the tone of time, the aesthetic delicacy, the international dialogue. Purdy's James is almost exclusively the author of the late "ghostly" tales—as if these were not also *social* tales, refinements of consequence, deeply rooted in, inextricable from, the incessant dialectic of James's ambivalent struggle with his European-American identity and with the difficult reconciliation of the Present with the Past and the Past in the Present. Ignoring the precise biographical misgivings that sustain the tension and heighten the significance of cultural detail sparingly employed in *The Beast in the Jungle* and *The Jolly Corner*, Purdy chooses to see these tales as gestures in the void, and the plight of Marcher, Brydon and Pendrel as anticipations of Alienated Man, comparable to the situation of Joseph K or—Purdy's heavier emphasis—to that of Beckett's characters, waiting for Godot. The step beyond despair is to abandon all effort to make sense of the contingent life and by punching a "hole in the fabric" accede to other conditions and forms of existence—at the risk of being translated into a tachyon beam! This is the step James was taking when he toyed with spiritism and when he wrote the stories mentioned above—and failed to complete *The Sense of the Past* which was nonetheless, we learn, a prophetic adumbration of J. W. Dunne's Serial Universe. To be sure, James did not understand that this was what he was doing but Strother Purdy, wise after the event, knows better. James was unwittingly a soulmate not only of Nabokov, Beckett, Borges and Grass but by an equally specious extrapolation, of Barth, Vonnegut and Burroughs!

Such a distortion of James's vision of things could only be constructed, if at all, by eliminating nine-tenths of the world he created and by willfully confusing the literary strategy of an hour with complete moral bankruptcy.

> What ties together the Jamesian concepts [those selected by Purdy from the Ghostly Tales] echoed by contemporary writers and makes their relation to contemporary literature so potent, is the matter of *absence* in James, primarily *absence* of what the novel always assured as present

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> before, the existence of understandable, predictable, *agency* in human affairs.

Surely this is so oblique as to demand little refutation by any attentive reader of the whole James. The *social imperative* was the prevailing agency in all of James's fictions, increasingly refined into an essence of moral casuistry. But since one sophistry of interpretation demands another to support it, the body of James's work must be stripped of its clothing, to demonstrate that James had *never* been authentically concerned with the historical setting in which his fictions had been composed.

> James never was . . . given to chronological progression; not only do his novels lack the linear progression that was concurrently growing into the large-scale novels of George Eliot, Galsworthy, Romains, and Thomas Mann, they also lack chronological specificity. They are typically removed in time from passing events, for they make no reference, or reference of the most glancing kind, to such events.

Nor did the novels of Jane Austen. Yet when you read them, unless you are historically illiterate, you know where and in which decade of the century they take place! "Reference of the most glancing kind" is all that's necessary; it is one of the arts of the Jamesian story.

As a corrective to the denatured James of Purdy's invention, Elsa Nettels, in her recent comparative study of James and Conrad[4] (a work of exceptional integrity and fine discriminations), has arrived at a contradictory and more reliable conclusion. Momentarily confounded by courtesy toward Leon Edel, she is "tempted to view James and Conrad as precursors of Nabokov, Gide and the 'new novelists' of France." She resists the temptation (Edel, himself, apropos James, had not elaborated his parenthetical whim), closing her subject with a firm *however* that restores to James the habiliments which Purdy refuses to see or considers expendable.

> What James and Conrad create in their fiction, however, is closer to the world of Flaubert's novels than to that of Robbe-Grillet's. . . . Both James and Conrad emphasize the opposition of life and art. . . . But neither James nor Conrad calls attention to the fictive nature of the world that he creates or undercuts its reality. . . . One may not know whether the Governess in *The Turn of the Screw* sees or imagines ghosts, whether Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* "wins" the moral victory Marlow says he wins, or whether the characters in *The Sacred Fount* have the motives the narrator thinks that they have. But in all three works the reader is never in doubt that the action presented to him is what the narrator thinks he is seeing. Newmarch is a place in fiction as Middlemarch is; Bly exists for the reader as Udolphe exists for the Gover-

[4] JAMES AND CONRAD, by *Elsa Nettels*. University of Georgia Press, $12.00.

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ness—a "real" place in a world the reader accepts as real. Characters retain their sense of past and present, and the fact that they describe an experience as dreamlike or absurd or unearthly indicates that they have an idea of the normal to which they refer.

From another perspective, Theodore Ziolkowski's inquiry into supernatural iconography in nineteenth-century literature (principally)[5] rebukes certain of Mr. Purdy's presumptions, even as it overlaps his territory. Ziolkowski makes it abundantly clear that he is concerned with a *convention* in literature, its modifications compelled by the changing premises of the social order and the wayward drifts and reversals of metaphysical concepts. Viewed against a backward reach of centuries and crowded by forerunners in the field of the "Gothic" tale, Henry James is here simply one among others who psychologized and sophisticated the supernatural mode. That he was the greatest artist, for other reasons, of the fin de siècle novel, is in this reference beside the point. After assimilating Ziolkowski's comprehensive and intricate history of fantastic fiction, it is less than ever feasible to accept Purdy's nagging choice of James as a uniquely dedicated voyager into the space-time continuum.

Disenchanted Images, patently intended for the University seminar brotherhood, is footnoted extensively and plotted in the accustomed manner. First, I tell you what I'm going to do; now, I tell you I'm doing it; finally, I restate what I have done. But the good professor successfully disarms us with the first sentence of his preface, quoting Madame du Deffand who, when asked if she believed in ghosts, replied, "No, but I'm afraid of them." Ziolkowski might well answer to the same question, "No, but I collect them." His manifest pleasure in collecting goes far to mitigate the impeding obligation whereby one is required, in such projects, to cite every known contributor in the related "disciplines," an obligation which, while I see no decent way of escaping it, too fatally often encumbers our unhalted reading of a text. Ziolkowski's scholarship—immense, tentacular!—is never an encumbrance. Nor is his method; he is aware of the danger. ". . . I hope that the historical narrative has at no point suffered for the sake of systematic rigor. This book is supposed to be fun." A supposition as rare as it is charming. And the book is fun. I might not have supposed it would be had I only a publisher's announcement that it was a "seminal study" in the literary usages of *doppelgängers*, walking statues, haunted mirrors and portraits that either come to life or embody the vicissitudes of the models that inspired them; fun, because Ziolkowski has no such designs on the reader as Purdy has (allowance made that I wasn't always sure what Purdy's designs in truth were!); he delights in his researches and asks us to share the delight as he stalks his compound subject, not only through labyrinths of worldwide folklore, antiquity and medieval legend but also in a hundred tales and plays of the century

[5] DISENCHANTED IMAGES: A LITERARY ICONOLOGY, by *Theodore Ziolkowski*. Princeton University Press. $12.50.

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before ours, adroitly synopsized (from Maturin, Hoffman, Poe, the Eichendorffs, Hawthorne, Mérimée, Rossetti, Gogol, Zola, Stevenson, James, *ad infinitum* truly!), which, to be frank, I don't ever want to read—or reread, as the case may have been. *My* pleasure was provoked not so much by the specific examples as by the sheer extent of this weird literary current and by Ziolkowski's fluent, untiring enthusiasm for rehearsing its tributaries.

The three objects or "images" of Ziolkowski's investigation—the breathing portrait, the animate stature and the magic mirror—which originate "in the primitive consciousness as projections of the human soul and [make] their way through pagan and medieval superstition into 18th- and 19th-century literature bearing supernatural associations" are at last (in this century) "disencumbered by rationalization and internalization of the last vestiges of their ancient meanings." Ziolkowski introduces his quest by asking why Jean Cocteau's film, *The Blood of a Poet*, opens with the three archetypal images. Cocteau, himself, had insisted that they came from the fathoms of his unconscious, from "the great darkness of the human body." Two hundred and fifty pages later, having traced these images through a host of literary and dramatic works, through copious transformations (from primitive beliefs and religious doctrine to Romantic *frisson* and symbol), Dr. Ziolkowski is prepared to receive Cocteau's claims of unconscious inspiration with profusely documented skepticism. Since the portrait that comes to life, the statue that walks or talks and the magic mirror are three of the most commonly encountered images in folklore and myth, as well as in the Gothic decades of modern literature,

> It seems far more likely that Cocteau was lowering the bathysphere of his imagination into the sea of literary tradition rather than into the sanguinary waters of his psyche and that the images sprang from the pages of books on his library shelves rather than from "the great darkness of the human body."

While these images are familiar, the author adds, their configuration in Cocteau's film is original. The three, each with its own history and characteristic context,

> almost never appear in the same literary text. . . . The fact that Cocteau can introduce all three of them within the first few minutes of the film indicates that the images have reached a point in their own history at which, liberated from the contexts and associations that normally govern them, they are free to be playfully assembled in new and surprising configurations.

If anything might revive my fading interest in Cocteau's tedious film, it would be the distinction conferred upon it by Dr. Ziolkowski's professional attention.

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This, I would say, is the unfailing reward of *Disenchanted Images*; that it reveals on every page the unsuspected ramifications of a bizarre continuity. Rather than quote a dozen short examples of Ziolkowski's resourceful pursuit of his themes,—this might give too miscellaneous an impression—I prefer to offer a single lengthy citation, on the art of *catoptromancy* (divination by mirrors)—"which we have already encountered in the story of Snow White"; it typifies the erudition, economy and wit of Ziolkowksi's contributions to the art of scholarly interrogation.

> . . . Any competent sorcerer [of the Middle Ages] was expected to be able to make a magic mirror, and every really important ruler was reputed to own one. (The dream of efficient technological intelligence-gathering antedates modern secret services by many centuries.) Magic mirrors are always associated with reports of Prester John, the legendary Christian potentate of India. According to one version, Prester John's mirror was set with three precious stones, which sharpened the senses of the viewer, and it was kept under constant scrutiny by three learned men, who could make out everything that was going on in the world. . . . Friar Bacon is said to have manufactured a magic mirror at Oxford in which one could see what people were doing anywhere on earth; but he subsequently destroyed his invention because it proved to be too great a distraction to his students. At its most sophisticated level, the art of catoptromancy distinguishes various kinds of magic mirror depending on the materials used and the process by which each is fabricated; the theurgic mirror, the mirror of Cagliostro, the Swedenborgian mirror, the Galvanic mirror, the cabalistic mirror, and various others. But basically all are indentical to the extent that they are consulted for divination only. In the twentieth century, magic has been largely replaced by science, but the goals are often the same. An American industrial engineer recently patented a mirror trademarked "Select-a-Size," which has found an eager market among weight-watchers and clothing designers. The upper part of the mirror remains flat, providing a true reflection of the head, and the curvature of the lower section can be adjusted to present a more flattering view of the body. Have we really come so far from "Mirror, mirror on the wall . . .?"

Ziolkowski, as you can see, works in an opposite direction from that of Strother Purdy. The phenomena of today's mass culture are "disenchanted" (or merely venal) editions of yesterday's *kitsch*. But this is not his substantial conclusion.

In his summing up, Ziolkowski finds suggestive implications in the cultural motive power that determines the numerous individual fantasies he has been exploring. (Italics in these quotations are mine). A "common fact linking the images that prevailed until about 1835 is that they all represent a threat to the individual from the *outside*." They embody fears of the kind of external authority that dominated Europe during the periods

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of the Revolutionary Directorate and the Napoleonic dictatorship. Hence—"The statue intrudes into the marriage of the hero and his bride"; the ancestral portrait leaves its frame to intercede in family affairs; the mirror reveals unwelcome, often fateful truths. With changing political circumstances at mid-century, "the doubling mirror and the portrait as *anima* represent a threat to the individual from *within*" (*the double*, in portrait or mirror, is not an alien foe but "a repressed aspect of the individual's own personality"—e.g. William Wilson and Dorian Gray). With the twentieth century, yet another transition has taken place: the portrait or mirror is penetrated by a character from this world (in James's *The Sense of the Past*, in Cocteau's film, in stories by Herman Hesse and Isaac Bashevis Singer). What is Ziolkowski's deduction? The common factor "motivating these heroes . . . would seem to be the impulse to explore other worlds and other dimensions, in contrast to the self-exploration represented by the doubling mirror and the portrait as *anima*." The latter images (or actions, if you prefer) "reveal the preoccupations of a society that has been relieved of its principal fears of *external* danger and that now devotes itself to the exploration of its own consciousness."

As much as I should like to submit to the congenial pressure of Dr. Ziolkowski, I am unpersuaded by his terminal inferences. A common impulse uniting the fancies of Henry James, Cocteau and I. B. Singer is to me inconceivable. But to leave personalities out of the question: society, in our time, has *not* been relieved of its fears of "external" danger! On the contrary, our era has been distinguished by *persistent* impositions, or threats of imposition, by external danger. Twentieth-century history is a sustained fugue of revolution, dictatorship and genocide. (Hasn't rumor reached Princeton?) Every soul on earth today lives under the threat of instant obliteration by an *external agency*, and with that as a rationalization, or from other sources of insecurity, paranoia is universally apparent, in "separatist" movements, "liberation" coups, race and gender aggressions, terrorist blackmail. . . . "Can it be chance," Dr. Ziolkowski finally asks, "that these aspects of the various images emerged on the eve of the age of consciousness-expanding drugs and space exploration?"

It cannot be chance if we acknowledge—and who does not?—that the phenomena of cultural history are interconnected; even so, degrees of value impose themselves. A hole in the fabric must not be confused with the whole of the fabric. I doubt that Professor Ziolkowski expects us to aggrandize drug addicts or science-fiction makers and readers as Faustians heroically exploring penultimate frontiers. Individuals everywhere are increasingly unable to cope with threats from within *or* without. Definable reasons for addiction to drugs and science fiction may be as multiple as the individuals (or the societies) addicted. Few of these reasons will appeal to anyone who, even in the face of extinction, prefers to believe with Henry James in *consciousness*, undrugged and undeluded, as an "illimitable power"—our *only* weapon against panic and dehumanization.

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